

LONDON THE READER

of Literature, Science, Art, and General Information.

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[REGISTERED FOR TRANSMISSION ABROAD.]

No. 905.—VOL. XXXV.]

FOR THE WEEK ENDING SEPTEMBER 4, 1890.

[PRICE ONE PENNY.]



[THE THORN IN THE FLESH.]

BRIDGED BY HIS LOVE.

BY THE AUTHOR OF

"Clytie Cranbourne," "The Golden Bowl,"
"Poor Loo," "Bound to the Trawl,"
"Fringed with Fire," &c., &c.

CHAPTER XI.

A SHARP REMEDY.

Take thou some new infection to the eye,
And the rank poison of the old may die.

WHEN the last visitor had left Lady Killbrook's drawing-room a silence fell upon the family like the hush that comes before the bursting of a storm.

Lady Mabel Marmion knew pretty well what the silence portended, and she was just a little anxious as to what might be the consequences to herself.

However, she showed no outward sign of anxiety, but toyed with her fan and pulled the ears of her pet spaniel with as much indolent unconcern as though the whole world were at her feet, respectfully awaiting the expression of her will.

Her manner tended to irritate Lady Killbrook almost as much as her past rudeness towards Harry had done, and she said, with a little more temper than discretion:

"I will thank you, Mabel, to reserve your excessive ill-breeding for your own guests in future, and not practise it upon mine again."

"What do you mean?" demanded Lady Mabel, her large face flushing, her prominent blue eyes ablaze with rage, and her countenance and appearance presenting a strong resemblance to those of a suddenly aroused tigress.

"Precisely what I say," was the haughty and unflinching reply. "Your attack upon Mr. Harcourt was most unwarrantable and most unladylike."

"It was neither!" retorted Lady Mabel. "I firmly believe that he has stolen the portrait."

"I do not," here interposed Lord Dunmow, "what should he want of Rosalind's portrait?"

"What, indeed!" sneered Lady Mabel, "ask Rosalind herself."

"If Harry had wanted my portrait I should have given it to him," said Rosie, while her lovely eyes flashed with generous indignation; "he knew that quite well, and he would no more be guilty of a mean or dishonourable action than you would, Dunmow."

"I am quite sure of it," replied the young man, "but," he added, dubiously, "why do you call him Harry? Surely there is nothing serious between you."

"The only serious thing is that we were children together, or, rather, he was a big boy, and I a little girl. Aunt Mabel knows it well, for she took me away against my will from Uncle Vane, who has married Harry's mother. Aunt Carrie and I were talking about him just as he and Lord Oaklands arrived."

"Oh!" said Dunmow.

The explanation no doubt was good, but it was not perfectly satisfactory.

Harcourt was a splendid fellow, but it would never do for Rosalind to think of marrying him.

But here the earl spoke.

He had been more startled and annoyed at his sister's behaviour than anyone but Harry himself could have been, and he said now, coldly and very distinctly:

"My wife is right, and while you are our guest, Mabel, you must treat those whom you meet here with civility, or you must go."

"I will go," said Lady Mabel, rising to her feet, her large frame dilated with passion. "I will go, and I will take my niece with me."

"You seem to forget that she is my niece also," returned Lord Killbrook, calmly.

"I do not," here volunteered Rosalind, "and unless you and Aunt Carrie wish me to leave you I won't do so."

Lady Mabel looked at her rebellious niece, then at the earl and countess, and feeling herself beaten, yet too proud and too savage to acknowledge her defeat, she drew her thin lips together in a determined, vindictive manner, and, without uttering a sound, turned, and left the room.

"She will go away at once, I suppose," said the countess, in a tone of relief, and yet with some anxiety, the natural feeling of a woman who had a horror of scandal.

"Not she," said the earl, disdainfully. "I know Mabel of old. She will do whatever seems most to her own advantage, and it will not suit her for the story to get abroad that she has been requested to leave her brother's house. She will apologise and behave better for the rest of the time she is with us."

Lady Killbrook shook her head.

She could not believe that Lady Mabel would apologise, and she sincerely hoped that she would not.

And Rosalind wished it more devoutly than any of the party, for she instinctively felt that if Lady Mabel remained an inmate of her uncle's house Harry Harcourt would carefully avoid calling there.

But Lord Killbrook was quite right in his surmise.

As soon as Lady Mabel's temper had cooled down and she was sufficiently calm to review the situation, she ordered her maid to suspend her preparations for departure and wrote a note of apology to her sister-in-law, admitting that she had first acted indiscreetly, and afterwards lost her temper, but adding that her anxiety for Rosalind had been the sole cause of what had occurred.

She further wrote that she was afraid Lady Killbrook would one day find that her fears with regard to Mr. Harcourt were not ill-founded.

Now this was what the countess was herself beginning to dread.

Rosalind might not be exactly in love with the young man. Or, if she were, it was quite possible that she was unconscious of her danger.

But in truth she espoused his cause far too warmly and sounded his praises in far too earnest a manner to be quite indifferent to him.

With some girls this very openness would be a sign of safety.

Rosalind was unlike other girls, however. Her mind was clear and open as the day. If she loved anyone who sought her love, she would see no reason for hiding her feelings. She would see no wrong and therefore no shame in the avowal of them, and those who knew her intimately would soon be able to read the story in her frank blue eye and her truthful countenance.

All this Lady Killbrook thought of, and she was convinced that there was danger to the girl under her care.

Then the responsibility of having such an embarrassing charge entirely on her own hands a little daunted her.

For her ladyship, having no daughters and only one son—who often treated her as an elder sister rather than a parent—had played the rôle of a young woman for so many years that she scarcely felt inclined to be troubled with the undivided responsibility of chaperoning a niece who was a beauty, and who for the family credit's sake must marry well, but who never could be sufficiently impressed herself with the sacredness of the obligations she owed to her relations and to society.

So when Lady Mabel's note was handed to her Lady Killbrook was just in the mood to accept an apology and thereby retain a valuable ally upon whom all responsibility could be shifted, if occasion arose.

The countess sought her husband, who smiled as he read the letter; but he was not so easily won over as his wife was disposed to be, and he insisted that his sister should also write an apology to Mr. Harcourt for anything she might have said to wound him.

This was a very bitter pill, but the proud woman made a virtue of necessity and swallowed it. The letter was written and Harry replied courteously, but he went no more to the house in Eccleston Square, in which resided the girl he loved. And truth to tell he was not invited to go.

Dunmow met him at his club and in various other places, and though he was cordial as ever he never asked him to the house.

And Lady Killbrook went out of her way to be civil to him when she met him in the houses of other people, but she quite forgot to send him a card for her next party, which was also to be her last for the season.

But though the Killbrooks politely closed their doors against him other people held our hero in no such terror.

This was particularly the case with the Earl of Dacre and his daughter, Lady Hilda Staines.

Lady Hilda was an heiress and an acknowledged beauty, and she had once laughingly asserted that while Miss Redesdale must make

a good match, she—Lady Hilda—could afford to please herself.

She had said this apropos of Harry Harcourt when the story of Lady Mabel Marston's treatment of him had reached her ears, and from that time she set herself assiduously to cultivate the young man's acquaintance.

She was cordially seconded in her endeavours by her father.

It must not for a moment be supposed that the earl wished his daughter to marry a commoner, still less a man who was most decidedly poor and of comparatively humble extraction. But his experience of his daughter was that if he opposed her she was pretty sure to get her own way, while if he seemed to fall in with her ideas she usually ended by doing as he wished her.

And, as may be supposed, Lady Hilda had not formed any definite intention of marrying our hero, still less had she thought of saying so.

She liked and admired him.

He was handsome, clever, and he was for a time, and to a certain extent, the fashion.

How much foundation there was in the story only those about whom it was told could really know, but rumour whispered that Lord Taxton, who was a bachelor and had no near kinsman to succeed him, had adopted Harry Harcourt.

Certain it is that he was very fond of the young man and treated him more like a son than a paid secretary, and it was surmised in many places that a seat would soon be found in Parliament for the noble statesman's favourite.

So most people accepted young Harcourt as much for what they believed he would become as for what he really was, and amongst them the Earl of Dacre was one who entertained a strong personal liking for him.

The earl was a poet himself, though, alas! not a successful one, but he was sensible enough not to be jealous of a younger and more fortunate rival.

Very splendidly were the volumes bound that bore the name of Dacre upon them, but the verses they contained were so utterly wanting in poetic power and feeling that, though the praises lavished on the noble author by friends to whom he presented costly copies were warm and numerous, the reviewers cut up the mawkish effusions without mercy, and one cruel critic said they were produced by mixing a teaspoonful of Swinburne with a hog'shead of water.

But this did not keep his lordship from rushing into print again and again, and his last book—thanks to young Harcourt's assistance—had been received more favourably.

Thus Harry was constantly at Lord Dacre's house, and he was blissfully unconscious that whenever he went there he was jealously watched by one of the servants, and that that servant was Ned Milstead.

More than once, indeed, Ned had been sent with a note, a book, or some choice cigars to Mr. Harcourt's rooms, but Harry had never seen the man, and, had he done so, would not have recognised him.

Young Harcourt's intimacy with the Dacres was soon noticed by people.

Lord Dunmow was among the first to be displeased with it; for he had more than half made up his mind to propose to Lady Hilda himself.

She was rich and beautiful and well born, in every way a suitable wife for him, and just as he was screwing up his courage to try to make the prize his own his own faithful friend seemed to stand in his way.

This was all the more exasperating because Rosalind strongly suspected that his cousin Rosalind preferred the young secretary to her more noble suitors.

Once, when Harry's supposed devotion to the fair Hilda Staines was under discussion in Rosalind's hearing, Dunmow had seen the girl turn pale and give a startled, frightened glance, as though she had received a sudden blow.

But, however little people might like the present condition of affairs, no one could do anything to change it.

If Harry was not quite as happy as he

desired, he did not show it in his face or manner.

He was not one of those men who carry their hearts upon their sleeves.

His countenance was always cheerful, though thoughtful, his smile was bright and gave no idea of any secret grief lurking behind it, and if his poems sometimes breathed of a deep passion, the mere echo of which thrilled the hearts of the readers, it only made his admirers regard him with increased wonder.

Though I have spoken of his being present at one fashionable assembly and another, he was not a mere idler wasting his time after the manner of Lord Dunmow or Lord Oaklands.

In point of fact he worked exceedingly hard—up early in the morning with his books and papers, staying up late at night in the gallery of the House of Commons, taking notes for his chief. Always accurate in all his statements, always reliable, he was slowly but surely making his way up the steep ladder at the top of which shone the jewel of success.

Few women appreciated true industry and earnestness of purpose more thoroughly than did Lady Hilda Staines, and she soon learned to admire Harry Harcourt's character more even than she did his handsome face and winning manners.

"The majority of the young men of my acquaintance spend their lives in trying to make as little use of them as possible," Lady Hilda one day remarked, when Lord Dunmow had seemed to her to be a trifle more than usual.

"I don't see how some fellows can help it," he replied, feeling that the shaft was intended for himself.

"Why can't they help it?" demanded the young lady, sharply.

"Well, their birth and position shut them out from so many things—look at me for instance."

"Yes," calmly and critically turning her dark eyes upon him.

"What can I do?" he inquired, hopelessly.

"Anything, I should say, if you only tried," she replied, a trifle disdainfully.

"Indeed, I should like to believe it, but I can't," he said, earnestly.

"But why can't you?"

"Because there is really nothing for a man like me to do," he returned. "My father wouldn't hear of my going into the navy when I was a youngster, and when I grew up my mother objected to the army. I might try to get into Parliament if it is true, but then I am no orator and I don't care for politics, so I should only occupy the place of a better man. I might make a good farmer, perhaps, but I don't know that I am fit for anything else."

"Then Mr. Harcourt was mistaken, he assured me only yesterday that you possessed first-rate abilities if you would only exercise them."

She looked so tauntingly provoking and so exceedingly pretty as she said this, intimating so clearly that she was prepared to take Dunmow's estimate of himself in preference to his friend's more flattering opinion, that he was irritated into retorting:

"It's very kind of Harcourt to give me a good character, I'm sure."

"Yes, isn't it?" she returned, with a smile. "But then Mr. Harcourt is kind, and besides he is so very clever."

"He is appreciated here at any rate," half sneered the young man, slightly losing his temper.

"Yes, I hope so; I always admire a man who has some purpose in life. I never could care for anybody who idled his life away."

"I do!" burst out Dunmow, passionately.

"Well, no, I was not going to say you," she replied, with a tantalizing smile.

"But you meant it, so I must take it as the answer to the question I was going to ask. By Jove, Harcourt's a lucky fellow. Good morning, Lady Hilda."

And before she could speak he was gone. Whereupon the young lady burst into a long peal of rippling laughter, which had scarcely ceased when Mr. Harcourt himself was shown into the room.

CHAPTER XII.

MISLEADING.

While all so hardly leagued the men's wars,
And love so sharp a snare for them contrives,
The fleeting span of one fair woman's days
Sufficeth many heroes' loves and lives.

The London season was drawing towards its close.

A dinner party, to be followed by a reception and a dance, at the Duchess of Surrey's, was to be the last entertainment that the Killbrooks and our heroine were to attend.

After this their London house would be given up.

They would betake themselves for a week to Hastings, and then the family would break up, Lady Mabel and Rosalind going on a round of visits, while the Killbrooks returned to Ireland.

These were their openly expressed plans, but anything might change them; indeed, Lady Killbrook and her sister-in-law fully expected that they would be changed.

"If Oaklands propose to Rosalind before we go away, it will make a considerable difference," the countess remarked, meditatively, when she and Lady Mabel were alone discussing their mutual arrangements.

"He is sure to do so," was the confident reply, "and, thanks to her seeing so little of Mr. Harcourt, Rosalind will accept him."

Lady Killbrook shrugged her shoulders as she said:

"Mr. Harcourt did not lose much by being driven from our house. I wastold the other day as a positive fact that he was going to marry Lady Hilda Staines."

"I don't believe a word of it," returned Lady Mabel; "but I don't care whom he marries provided he is out of Rosalind's way."

At this moment Rosie herself joined her aunts.

The girl had become a trifle languid and weary of late. She seemed like a lovely flower drooping in an over-heated and unnatural atmosphere.

"You look pale, my dear," said Lady Killbrook, anxiously; "you had better lie down for an hour, or go for a ride, whichever you think will do you most good. We want you to look your very best to-night."

"I can't ride with only a groom to accompany me," replied Rosie, half fretfully; "and Dunmow seems so changed of late, he never cares to go anywhere now."

"I confess I cannot understand my son," observed the countess; "he will sit a whole morning in the study poring over books and papers. He attends political meetings, and I have even heard that he goes to the British Museum and works there. I can't understand it."

"Oh, I can; and I think Dunmow is quite right," returned the girl. "I only wish I were a man to be able to do some real work. I feel such a useless creature."

"Your use is to look pretty, my dear," here interposed Lady Mabel; "and if you want a walk or a ride I will go with you, as your aunt says it is very desirable that you should not look fagged this evening. I think it more than probable that Lord Oaklands will formally propose to you to-night or to-morrow."

"I hope he won't," was the reply, "I don't feel in the least inclined to accept him."

"If you don't I shall never forgive you," exclaimed Lady Mabel, passionately.

"There, there; Rosalind must judge for herself," interposed the countess, gently; "he is a good match, my dear," she continued, turning to Rosie, "but we don't live in the days when girls can be made to marry against their will, and even if we did such a proceeding should never have my countenance."

"Thank you, Aunt Carrie," exclaimed Rosalind.

Then she threw her arms round Lady Killbrook's neck and ran out of the room to hide the tears which she could not restrain.

"What remarkable behaviour," uttered Lady Mabel, disdainfully.

"She is but a child," returned the countess, tenderly, "and you have but very little softness and womanly sympathy with her, Mabel. She is naturally very affectionate and clinging, and I could lead her miles in a direction she did not want to go when you could not drive her one inch."

"Oh, I know she is not to be driven," sneered Lady Mabel, "she and I have had too many contests for me not to know that; but I cannot condescend to appear to be what I am not. I feel exceedingly vexed with her now. She has gone upstairs to moan and cry, and her eyes will be red and swollen for the evening—I must go and rouse her."

"You had much better leave her alone," said Lady Killbrook, decisively; "if she has her cry out she will be calmer and more self-possessed afterwards. I have noticed for several days past that she has not been quite well."

Lady Mabel shrugged her shoulders and put on the injured expression of one who is always wronged and misunderstood.

And thus Rosie was left to weep herself to sleep, and to realise that even in the midst of triumph the most envied of mortals may yet suffer the bitterest heartache.

There were no signs of tears left upon her face that evening when she went to the duchess's ball.

A seductive gentleness, far more dangerous to the heart of man than the most brilliant animation, had taken the place of her usual wilfulness.

Her dress also added to this subtle charm.

It was of some pale blue luminous material that suggested the idea of fleecy clouds, while a few silver stars gleamed out from between its folds.

The toilette, the fair face, and the willowy grace of the figure together seemed a living poem—so one young poet at any rate thought, and he sighed heavily as he watched her from a distance, and told himself again and again that the bright dream of his life would never be realised.

For, in truth, Harry was more disappointed in Rosalind herself than he was daunted by the wide social gulf that yawned between them.

He had believed in her love for him so implicitly.

Judging her feelings by his own, he had made no allowance for time and change of scene and circumstances, still less had he remembered what a child she was when they parted, and how the great mysteries of life and love were to her mind words and words only.

So he has told himself of late that he must forget the fair divinity who can give but liking in exchange for the passionate love of a man's strong nature, and that he must think no more of the woman in whose heart ambition outweighs every other feeling.

He has even set deliberately to work to bring about his own cure by means of the influence of the dark, passionate beauty of Lady Hilda Staines.

But he cannot flatter himself that he is succeeding.

Had he been heart-whole when they first met, the beauty, and wit, and grace of the earl's daughter would, without doubt, have fascinated him.

Now, however, he was proof against all other women, because his heart was so completely given to one.

But he and Rosalind were often guests under the same roof, without meeting face to face, and oftener still without speaking.

Sometimes, it is true, his feelings got the mastery of his judgment, and he would hover about the vicinity of the beauty ready to step forward and ask her hand for a dance, if she ever so faintly smiled upon him.

But Rosalind was always carefully guarded by

one or the other of her aunts, and, oddly enough, the vigilance of Lady Killbrook, who really liked him, was very much more difficult to elude than that of Lady Mabel, who most cordially detested him.

For the countess would declare that her niece was engaged, and offer to console him by dancing with him herself, or she would send him to an adjoining room on some commission, or ask him to give her his arm to the balcony or refreshment-room, as the case might be.

Lady Mabel could not with any decency do this, and as she could not keep Rosalind from speaking to the young man she often found herself out-generalled.

All these things, however, were but trifles. The unwelcome truth had forced itself deep down into Harry's heart that Rosalind did not love him as he loved her, and thus his only ground for believing that he should ever win her hand was cut away from under his feet.

This evening in particular he stands and watches her without making the least effort to join the throng of admirers that crowd about her chair.

Once her eyes rest upon him, but she averts them instantly. Too quickly and too consciously her aunt, who is watching her, considers. But she is discreetly silent.

Rosalind is sometimes a puzzle and at other times a great anxiety to her.

Rosalind dances, and smiles, and listens to the sweet flatteries whispered in her ears, for she is in a strangely dreamy condition. Whether happy or miserable she herself scarcely knows.

Lord Oaklands is more than usually attentive, and is even affectionate in his manner, for, without doubting what the result of his suit will be, he means to-night to ask the important question as a matter of form, obtain the lady's "Yes," and to-morrow he will publicly announce the engagement for the benefit of all whom it may concern.

And Rosalind calmly accepts his devotion as though it were her natural due.

But ever and anon her eyes covertly glance at that solitary figure standing by the palms and blooming azaleas at the entrance to a tiny conservatory.

So long as the figure is alone, and is silently watching her, she is satisfied; but when one fair dame after another drifts his way and claims his attention, she becomes restless and a trifle uncertain in her smiles.

Lord Oaklands takes her into the ball-room to dance, but when she returns this time Harry has moved away from the palms.

A little later and she and Lord Dunmow almost knock against Mr. Harcourt and Lady Hilda Staines as they are waiting. Harcourt does not see them, for Lady Hilda is looking up to his handsome face with her own dark, passionate eyes, and he is bending low and speaking to her even as they whirl round and round on the polished floor.

"I am tired. The room is hot; pray take me to some cooler place," gasped Rosalind, in such evident agitation that her cousin would have guessed the cause at once if he had not been himself equally disturbed in mind.

Since his conversation with Lady Hilda he had set himself earnestly to work, hoping to win her good opinion, for the poor fellow after much wavering and vacillation had fallen desperately in love with her.

To see the woman he hoped to win, however, in the arms of another man, even in a dance, and looking up to his face with such evident admiration in her own, was certainly enough to upset the equanimity of a far more stoical man than was Lord Killbrook's only son, and he could scarcely have gone on with the dance even had Rosalind wished it.

So the cousins withdrew from the giddy maze and sought a cool retreat in a dimly-lighted balcony filled with rare flowers, and, having found Rosie a seat, Dunmow left her under the pretext of going to find a servant to bring her some lemonade.

In truth, he wanted to get away to fight with the passion that tormented him.

He wanted to be free from observation to

struggle with himself till the sharpness of his agony was over.

And Rosalind leaned back on her low seat, half hidden by the flowers and held her gloved hands tightly together as though she would crush the small fingers in her effort to control her emotion.

But a fate pursued her this evening. She had not been here long, she had scarcely recovered her calmness, before a voice which she instantly recognised from its high-pitched tone as Lady Hilda's fell upon her ears.

Another voice—a voice that Rosie Redesdale had once known well—replied in deep, clear, musical accents.

The words may have been simple, but the listener did not hear them, and it seemed to her excited fancy as though they could be none but words of love, and then the speakers came in sight, and the lady said:

"Let us rest here, we shall have the place all to ourselves."

Rosalind instinctively rose to her feet, and, unconscious of her actions, she pressed her hand upon her heart, and with an expression of agony on her sweet young face leaned against a marble statue as though she were about to faint.

She knew her own heart now. But the knowledge came late.

She loved Harry Harcourt. Loved him as she could never love again, and his heart she believed was now given to another—that other who was sitting listening to the voice that had once whispered words of earnest love to herself.

All the sweet memories of her early girlhood came back again, and she thought, bitterly:

"All men must be false if he can change like this."

Forgetting that the change had all along been in herself.

She was unconscious of the length of time she remained here, but it could not have been many minutes before Lord Oaklands came to seek her.

He had been sent by her cousin, Dunmow, and he came upon her retreat before she was conscious of his proximity.

"This will be a good opportunity," he thought, as he slowly approached the spot where Rosalind was still standing.

The other couple were hidden from his view by the palms and abundant foliage.

"How shall I begin?" he mused. "Shall I tell her I love her, like any country swain wooing a milkmaid, or shall I tell her that I think it wouldn't be a bad thing for us to get married as all our people want us to do? No, I don't like either course. I'll trust to the inspiration of the moment. By Jove, she's been crying."

This to himself in startled surprise as he caught a full view of the girl's face.

He hesitated, not knowing whether to advance or retreat.

One never likes to intrude upon grief unless one is quite sure of being able to alleviate it.

For an instant he thought of turning back, but vanity whispered that perhaps his procrastination in proposing was the real cause of her tears.

The idea was flattering to his self-love, and, therefore, not to be dismissed lightly, so, after a moment's consideration, he assured himself that this must be the true state of the case, and stepping forward he caught one of her hands in his own, threw his arm round her waist with perfect self-possession, and said, in the eager, passionate tones which he thought exactly suitable to the occasion:

"Rosalind, my darling, what ails you?"

Never had Lord Oaklands been more earnest, and never had his earnestness been more unwellcome.

For a second or two Rosalind was passive, staring at him in mute astonishment without being able to comprehend his meaning, then she shrank from his embrace, and such a look of entreaty and agony came into her face that his

glance involuntarily followed the direction of her eyes.

Then he saw Harry Harcourt, who had been leaning over Lady Hilda's chair, turn at the sound of voices and seem for a moment to stand petrified with surprise or with some sudden rush of feeling.

Which it was the young nobleman could not tell.

He, for his part, was quite unconscious of the impression he was giving, for his arm still clasped Rosalind's waist, and he still held her hand tightly in his own, though her head was half averted.

Harcourt's face had become pale at first, but as he realised the scene it assumed an expression of rigidity and sternness, and he said to Lady Hilda:

"Let us go."

She rose from her seat, glanced round, saw the interesting tableau, and with a low laugh that might have been inspired by triumph, or by mirth, took the young man's arm and strolled away.

"What is the matter with you, Rosalind?" demanded Lord Oaklands, puzzled and anxious. "Are you ill? Tell me, dearest."

But Rosalind did not reply.

Suddenly she seemed to become a dead weight on his arm, and, glancing in alarm at her face, he saw that she had fainted.

"This is awkward—deuced awkward," he muttered, as he placed her on a couch and turned to look about to see what help could be obtained without attracting much attention.

He had not far to look, for the duchess, in whose house they were at that moment, approached the alcove accompanied by Lady Killbrook herself.

"Ah! here my niece is. Why, what's the matter?" asked Lady Killbrook, in a tone expressive of genuine concern.

"I think she has fainted," said the young man; "I will get some water at once."

"Stop," said Lady Killbrook, a trifle sternly, "what made her faint—has anything unpleasant happened?"

"No, not that I know of. I began to say something, and she fainted right off."

"To propose?" asked her ladyship, who was determined not to let the young man escape.

"Yes," he replied, a trifle sulkily.

"Ah! I think you shall get her some water," said her ladyship, with a beaming smile. "She has not been quite well for a day or two," then turning to her grace, she added, confidentially, "I must take the dear child home as soon as she recovers; her feelings have overcome her."

(To be Continued.)

BUTTER AND CHEESE OF THE ANCIENTS.

FROM the fact that ancient writers of the Hebrew and Greek schools do not mention butter or cream some have concluded that neither was known or used up to nearly the close of the first century of the Christian era; but this must be a mistake, for no doubt one of the oils mentioned in the Old Testament was of a butyraceous description. The milk of herds and of goats is spoken of, consequently there must have been cream, and butter also, produced by the conveyance of milk in skins on camel-back, as it is frequently carried in what is called the Holy Land to-day. The climate, in patriarchal times, as at present, would not allow butter to remain long in a solid state; and hence its mention as oil. This is, however, speculative, though more than probable.

Pliny speaks of "cow-cheese," which he calls butyrum; and the nomad Arabs made what they called "kymac," which is a thickened preparation of cream almost like butter. It is made by shaking cream of goat's milk in a calabash. The native East Indians made butter from buffaloes'

milk, which they called "ghee," which is simply butter of a thick, oily consistency.

Homer and Virgil both mention cheese, the former that could be cut by a knife—Hercamede being described in the Iliad as having shred and scraped goat's cheese into a posset he prepared for the wounded Machaon. Virgil leaves cheese with no greater consistency than curd, which the Scythians used to mix with mare's blood and feast upon.

Long before the Christian era the buttery extract from milk was used by the barbarous nations and by the Romans as an ointment, with which they anointed children when teething, and applied to their skins to defend them from the sun. This was butyrum, ghee, or melted butter; and, if it looked then no more tempting than when presented forty years ago, under an Arab tent at the second cataract of the Nile, it must have been then, as now, a very repulsive appearing article of food, with most offensive smell of rancidity.

ANTIQUITY OF NURSERY RHYMES.

MANY of these productions have a very curious history, if it could only be traced. Some of them probably own their origin to names distinguished in our literature; as Oliver Goldsmith, for instance, is believed in his earlier days to have written such compositions.

Dr. E. F. Rimbault gives us the following particulars as to some well-known favourites:—

"Sing a Song of Sixpence" is as old as the sixteenth century. "Three Blind Mice" is found in a music book dated 1609. "The Frog and the Mouse" was licensed in 1580. "Three Children Sliding on the Ice" dates from 1639. "London Bridge is Broken Down" is of unfathomed antiquity. "Girls and Boys come out to Play" is certainly as old as the reign of Charles II.; as is also "Lucy Locket lost her Pocket," to the tune of which the American song of "Yankee Doodle" was written. "Pussy Cat, Pussy Cat, where have you been?" is of the age of Queen Bess. "Little Jack Horner" is older than the seventeenth century. "The Old Woman Tossed in a Blanket" is of the reign of James II., to which monarch it is supposed to allude.

THE VALUE OF CHANGE OF SCENE.

To the majority of us life is most frightfully monotonous. A perpetual round of duties has a depressing effect both on the body and mind. It wears us day by day to see the same faces, view the same things, hear the same voices, smell the same odours, listen to and talk the same platitudes. After long experience at home we know exactly how the tea will taste, how the sirloin of beef is likely to be served up, what probability there is of the mutton being tough or the steak underdone. We know, too, exactly what the wife will say when we come home, and the exact tone in which she will say it. When people live together day after day, month after month, and year after year, they find it very difficult to find subjects for profitable conversation.

This monotony can best be combated by change of air; for with this comes variation of scene; with that arrives change of thought; and with that, again, start up new trains of ideas and expansion of mind. To go for change of air is, or ought to be, an expedition in quest of information and a search for something new. From it one returns with a fresh fund of anecdotes, a new collection of stories, a fuller repertoire of experiences, and an additional store of illustrations, which for months to come serve to brighten the dull realities of life. It is obvious that if the main object of change of air is to get over the results of monotony, Paterfamilias should not always travel with his wife and family.



[MISS BRIERLY RIDES.]

THE FORTUNES OF ELFRIDA.

BY THE AUTHOR OF

"Within a Maze," "Won Without Wooing,"
and other Interesting Stories.

CHAPTER IV.

ELFRIDA'S FIRST PEEP AT SOCIETY.

Yes, yes, oh, hasten not,
From this delightful spot.
Paradise it seems,
Where I have walked in glories,
And from henceforth to be
With all my dreams.

When the meeting recorded took place the short season at Shingleham was drawing to a close, and Mrs. Harvard, who generally gave the signal for flight, left two days later on. The rest took wing in little batches in the course of the following week, but Jacob Brierly kept Elfrida there for another fortnight.

What a delightful time it was then. Shingleham, given over to solitude, or nearly so, was a little Paradise. They went no more upon the pier but wandered or rested about the beach—Elfrida with a little spade and bucket, wrapt in the delight of building houses of sand, and sometimes digging holes, little pits in which she hoped to catch fish. More frequently she put great heaps together and called them castles and mansions.

But how frail these mansions were. The lazy sea, unstimulated by wind, rolled in easily and licked up the labour of an hour in half-a-dozen seconds, and filled up the pits so that Elfrida could not even mark the spot where they had been with anything approaching exactness. She was angry with the sea, and sometimes would

stamp her little foot as it crept in to its work of destruction and bid it keep back. When it had come and returned, bearing with it the spoils of her house, she would shed tears of vexation, and sometimes call it bitter names in her childish way.

Jacob Brierly used to smile at these petulant exhibitions, but Miss Steelson always looked grave, yet she did not attempt to enforce any lesson at the moment, as perhaps she might have done.

She might have told her that she could no more control the sea than she would hereafter be able to keep back the tide of life which would most surely bear away many a castle of her fancy, many hopes and aspirations, much that she would love, and leave her with only a sheet of sand to gaze upon. Some people with Miss Steelson's experience would assuredly have done so, but she drew no moral. "It would only confuse the child," she thought, "and bear no fruit."

Fourteen quiet days, and then they went home. There was a note from Mrs. Harvard for Jacob Brierly in which she reminded him of his promise, and expressed a hope that he and Miss Steelson had found the air of Shingleham beneficial. It was Tuesday when they arrived at Easterley, and on the morrow Miss Steelson took Elfrida to the Close, where Mrs. Harvard lived—the quiet, neatly kept, well-ordered Close, with its grave, solemn houses and trim gardens gathered around the grand cathedral, gray with the storm and sunshine of centuries. No noisy boys at play as in the church alley at home (I will tell you more about that alley anon), no hawkers of fruit or fish, bawling themselves hoarse, nothing indeed visible but the dean's dog, old and venerable as became his position, and a butcher's boy, deferentially ringing the servants' bell at Canon Warren's gate, prior to asking in a subdued voice if there were any orders that day.

Elfrida knew that boy, but her previous experience of him was that he was pert, loud

voiced, and given to shrill whistling. What had changed him? Child-like she wondered, but by-and-bye she understood it all.

There was a great red house facing the cathedral with posts and chains in front and a yew tree growing on each side of it. Miss Steelson said that used to be Mrs. Harvard's house, but since her little family had grown up and gone into the world she had left it for a smaller place.

To this they presently came, and Elfrida was delighted with it. It was very small, but so old and quaint and pretty, and with such splendid shrubs and trees creeping about it. To Miss Steelson it had a sad look, such as we sometimes see upon the faces of men who have outlived their time and all their friends, but she smiled when Elfrida clasped her hands together and with a deep-drawn breath exclaimed:

"This must be the prettiest house in the world."

It was past eleven o'clock, but Mrs. Harvard was not yet visible. A trim servant maid told Miss Steelson so, and asked if she would come in and wait. Miss Elfrida was to go into the garden, where she would find a companion.

Miss Steelson declined to wait, and, leaving a message for Mrs. Harvard to the effect that she would call for Elfrida at six o'clock, went homeward, walking very slowly and deeply thinking.

Meanwhile Elfrida had been shown the way to the garden, which was larger than she expected to find it, and surrounded by a high wall covered with fruit trees. Everything growing appeared to be in a flourishing condition.

But Elfrida only glanced at the fruit and flowers, for there was her companion that was to be, seated upon the lawn, not upon the grass but upon a campstool. Here was another surprise for Elfrida, for it was a boy, and she expected to find a girl like herself waiting for her advent.

The servant, having shown her as far as the garden, did not wait. It was not her business to bring the young people together, and so she

left them. Elfrida felt very shy, but the boy, hearing her footstep, looked up, and, rising, advanced towards the least air of embarrassment.

"Miss Brierly, I presume."

At the outside he was eleven years of age, but beyond his peach-like cheeks and tender frame there was little of the boy about him. He raised his straw hat and bowed with easy grace, and when Elfrida held out her hand he took it and led her to the seat he had lately occupied.

"Won't you sit down?" he said. "You must be fatigued with your walk. Oh, no, you are not taking my seat"—he was answering a look of hers; "I brought it out for you. There was a dew last night, and I don't think we can trust the garden seats just yet. But I am very glad you are come, I have been looking forward for some days to this pleasure."

"Have you?" exclaimed Elfrida, with sparkling eyes.

"Indeed I have," said the boy, getting more animated—he was a very handsome boy, with a sleepy and rather sensual look, and Elfrida was delighted with him. "My dear aunt—by the way, I have not yet told you who I am—my name is Algernon Leighton, and my mother is Mrs. Harvard's niece, I always call Mrs. Harvard grandmother—she prefers it. Perhaps you have heard of us—the Leightons of Hazzard Hall?"

Elfrida shook her head; she had never heard of the family or their residence.

He seemed surprised, but did not express it any further than a slight raising of the eyebrows and an amused glance at her pretty face; he admired her but he pitied her ignorance.

"As I was saying," he continued, "my dear aunt told me of your coming, and led me to think all sorts of good things about you, and I am not dissatisfied. I hope we shall be friends."

"Oh, yes; let us be friends," said Elfrida, eagerly. "I like you very much."

The boy smiled, and, taking her hand again, drew her arm through his, leading her on.

"You have rested, I hope," he said. "Come, let me show you the place. There are some very curious nooks and crannies about this garden."

I should like to linger, if there were time, with these children as they wandered about this garden, but we must hurry on and let their words and actions tell the story how their acquaintance rapidly ripened.

He became more like a boy, and she assumed more womanly airs, gradually bringing him down to his proper level—that is, the level a man always finds when he falls in love.

More older and wiser people than he have been humbled by a pretty face and winning, natural grace.

When Mrs. Harvard came out she found them together under the shade of a magnolia tree—Elfrida upon the campstool, and Algernon lying at her feet.

He had gathered some flowers and she was making a wreath for him.

There was something in this pretty picture that gave the proud woman a catching in her throat, but in a moment it was gone and she walked up to them quietly, and stood watching the progress of the wreath, until Elfrida, raising her eyes, became aware of her presence, and rose in some confusion.

"Come here, my pretty child," said Mrs. Harvard, stooping down, "kiss me. There, do not be hurried—a lady should always be calm. Algernon, I hope you have not taken cold—lying upon the grass is always dangerous."

He made a suitable reply and they strolled about the garden together—Algernon with his original courtly airs upon him, and Elfrida, nearly but not quite, back to her childish timidity.

They had an early luncheon, for it was the day Mrs. Harvard was "at home."

Elfrida, in her innocence, when told of this asked where she lived other days, and the courtly Algernon was betrayed in a sudden and uncontrollable risibility of the muscles of his face. He laughed, and Elfrida, conscious of having made a blunder, flushed angrily.

Mrs. Harvard gave him a look of reproof, and he apologised, but Elfrida was cool towards him for the rest of the day.

A little before three o'clock Mrs. Harvard and the children went into the drawing-room, and shortly after a lady arrived. She came in a carriage drawn by a pair of magnificent horses, and there were a coachman and footman in gorgeous livery.

Elfrida saw them all through the window, and wondered if Uncle Brierly could afford to keep the same sort of thing, and then she hoped he would do so, for her, one day.

The lady proved to be the Honourable Miss Stafford-Stafford ("Of Blackthorne," whispered Algernon to Elfrida, but he got no thanks for the additional information), and she had nice ways and spoke nice words, but they were all hard and cold, like pretty pebbles, and Elfrida was not very sorry when she gave place to two old maids, daughters of the dean—who were quiet, but undoubtedly sympathetic, and Elfrida liked them very much.

Their talk was mainly of the church and its charities, and the trouble they had with the professional poor, who it seemed were quite a distinct class to the really needy.

Algernon favoured Elfrida with another whisper, informing her that "the poor were all impostors," but she told him silently "she knew better," and he, in dudgeon, went over to the other side of the room and tried to ignore her.

But the boy is father to the man, and the attempt failed most miserably.

From three till five visitors, numbering a score or so, called—in in batches, some singly, and nearly all ladies.

The only gentlemen who came were two minor canons who accompanied their wives.

Occasionally there was a brief interval with nobody there, and then Mrs. Harvard talked to the children, mostly about the people who had called.

There were two or three things Elfrida picked up that afternoon, among these the real position of trade.

One lady, talking county matters, spoke of a Mr. Roger Twine who had bought an estate a few miles from Easterley, and had built thereon a mansion of some pretension, but nobody had called upon him because he had made his money in an oilcake business, and no doubt, in a perverse spirit, stuck to the business still.

The young but clear brain of Elfrida immediately began to reason out the probabilities of her uncle being received if he bought an estate and built a house upon it. Oilcake sounded more common than yarn, but she knew both were uncanny in the eyes of these proud people.

As a rule the ladies did not talk much about their position and families, but one or two talked of nothing else. Society was the Alpha and Omega of their conversation, and some of their talk was not fit for the ears of the young, but they hoped, like the fools they were, that it was all Dutch to her. Elfrida learnt the supposed fact that to be a gentleman a man must have a line of gentlemen for his ancestors. She mused much after this, and for the first time wondered what sort of people the father and grandfather of Jacob Brierly were.

After five o'clock the children had tea together, but Mrs. Harvard took nothing, as she dined at six. Algernon was perfectly polite to Elfrida, and attended to her wants with all the care good breeding demands, but he was cool with it. Elfrida, so ready to learn, treated him with courteous, lady-like indifference.

Miss Steelson was punctual, and as Mrs. Harvard was making some trifling change in her dress for dinner, the housekeeper did not see her, but she received a message in which Mrs. Harvard expressed the pleasure the presence of Elfrida had given her, and sent her compliments to Mr. Brierly.

Algernon was the gentleman to the last. He saw Elfrida to the gate, shook hands with her, bowed to the housekeeper, and went back to the house, marvelling at finding in his aunt's house a girl who did not know what being "at home" on certain days meant. Elfrida led him to think

a little of her world, while he had unconsciously taught her to think a deal of his.

The moment the gates were passed, Elfrida, homeward bound, felt conscious of a change in everything—all so quiet, so refined within, all without so noisy and—yes! she had already caught the word—so common. Boys whistling and whooping about the streets; men driving carts and exchanging rough jokes with each other; little dirty children here and there crawling on the pavement and about the doorways; and, oh! horror, a coarse man with a dirty face reeling about, the worse for drink, with a little mob of boy tormentors and a sprinkling of girls at his heels. Was there, could there be anything in society so awful as this?

They crossed the road to avoid him and turned up the street leading to their home. It was a very quiet thoroughfare, with houses that were at least respectable, but in Elfrida's eyes it was not what it had been. She was moody, and just a little sorry she had not been kinder to Algernon Leighton.

Her home was a little way down the alley, with its low chimney wall on the opposite side, as I have told you, and no carriage could come up that narrow way to the door (in Mrs. Brierly's time they had a covered way put up on guest nights). It was not a nice place any more; the church was good enough, but the grass around its graves was coarse and not kept smooth like the green in the Close. She felt she would never like the place again; she would not like Algernon to visit her there.

"Do you know, my dear," said Miss Steelson, when they got indoors, "you have not said a word to me all the way home?"

"I have been thinking," replied Elfrida, with a sigh; "I am tired and wish to go to bed."

"But your uncle will be in directly," urged the housekeeper; "he would like to have you with him as usual for an hour."

"Ask him to excuse me to-night," said Elfrida, with a strong resemblance to Algernon for the moment upon her, "and—give him—my—love."

Miss Steelson led her upstairs and helped her to undress.

Elfrida lay down and closed her eyes, but when Miss Steelson stole in softly two hours later she found the child's eyes open with a fixed look upon them.

"Still thinking, dear," she said.

"Yes," replied Elfrida. "Oh, Miss Steelson, you are always so kind to me. Will you tell me one thing?"

"Yes, if it will do you good."

"Is my uncle Jacob rich?"

The housekeeper sat down and took the child's hand in hers, softly caressing it, as she answered:

"I do not know how rich Mr. Brierly is, but I believe he has as much money as he requires."

"Oh, I see," said Elfrida, shrewdly, "you won't tell me—but I will ask Uncle Jacob to-morrow myself, and he will be sure to tell me all I want to know."

CHAPTER V.

PROGRESS.

Oh! Time, now slowly move,
Change not the form I love,
Keep it ever in sight.
Let the air breathe on her,
And the sun beam on her—
My own heart's delight.

This question was put to Jacob Brierly by Elfrida without loss of time.

"Are you rich, uncle?" she asked the next morning at breakfast, and he replied, carelessly:

"People consider me so; and I have enough—more than enough."

The eyes of the child flashed, but she said no more just then. Nay, for weeks and months she said but little, going every Wednesday to the house in the Close, and looking forward each time to the going with unmitigable pleasure, but keeping what she learnt there and what she thought about it to herself.

One day Jacob Brierly asked Miss Steelson if it was advisable for Elfrida to learn to ride.

"It is a lady's accomplishment," was the cautious reply; "but it is not absolutely necessary for a lady to acquire."

"Elfrida wishes it," said Jacob Brierly, and arrangements were made that day for the best master in the town to give instruction, and to look out for a suitable pony.

It was the first step, and I must not linger to tread each other step with you one by one. Miss Brierly had a high spirit, which increased in strength with time. Her uncle was very fond of her, and she had her own way.

All Easterley—or the better part of it—talked of her beauty. People came to the doors and windows to see the golden-haired girl ride fearlessly by, followed by a groom, who came, as other things did, with time; and before she was ten years old it was whispered about that she would scatter the yarn-spinner's money if ever she had the handling of it.

Nobody knew who she really was, and all sorts of stories were afloat. She was like the Harvards, some of the people said. (Poor people are often very keen in observing their betters.) But none of the upper ten perceived it, or if they did they kept their own counsel, for was it not known that she was the daughter of a poor man, adopted by the owner of a factory who lived in a second-rate part of the town?

But one fact remained: Mrs. Harvard had taken her up, and people were very gracious to her. She went to a great many very charming entertainments for children, where she saw many young gentlemen like Algernon; only none were, in her eyes, quite so handsome, and a host of young ladies, all well versed in etiquette, and so many living guides to the aspiring Elfrida.

The years slipped by, and she was twelve ere her uncle could think her more than a child. Mrs. Harvard then suggested home tuition—(Elfrida had an excellent governess chosen by Miss Steelson)—should be given up, and her promising protégée go to a boarding-school. Jacob Brierly struggled against the suggestion, but Elfrida pleaded her own desire to go, and he yielded.

Three years of school, with intervals at home—intervals broken into by frequent visits to the Close and friends outside to whom she had become known—and then Mrs. Harvard sent for Jacob Brierly and told him his protégée ought to have two years as a Continental finish to her education.

"If only to acquire the languages," she argued. "But there is a more important thing—she will get tone. I know an excellent school at Paris. Mrs. Stafford-Stafford was educated there. Your wife was one of its pupils."

There was no drawing back. Little by little he had allowed Elfrida to be drawn into the vortex of a life he had not designed for her, and now a rescue was out of his power. He would give no answer however until he had consulted Miss Steelson.

What Miss Steelson said was this: "Her future is now in her own hands. You are powerless as a guide. You gave up that position seven years ago on the pier at Shingleham."

Suppressing a groan he sat down and wrote an affirmative reply to Mrs. Harvard, and a fortnight later Elfrida, in the charge of a lady agent of the Parisian schoolmistress, was gone.

"For two whole years," moaned Jacob Brierly, "the light is gone from my home. Will she ever bring it back again?"

It was nearly fifteen years since the night when Caroline Harvard left his child to the manufacturer's care, and during the whole of that time nothing had been heard of him. Jacob Brierly had long since ceased to think much about his brother-in-law, having the conviction of his having failed abroad, or met with an untimely death.

If ever he thought of him at all, it was as one thinks of something half forgotten. But the child had wound herself round his heart, and every little step she took from him rent asunder a deeply-rooted fibre of tenderness.

He did not show his sorrow, not being a

demonstrative man; but nature told the story in his hair, grown white, and in deep furrows cut deep by the plough of anxious care. Miss Steelson's hair had grown white, and between the two, master and servant though they were, was a strong chain of sympathy. But neither ever broached the subject. Each heart hugged its own sorrow close and mourned in secret.

On the day the young girl left—almost a woman in her looks—Algernon Leighton, handsome, but with too much boldness in his eyes, perhaps, saw her off and whispered to her that he should never smile until her return. She smiled upon him, then gave him a small hand, which he fervently pressed, and was whirled away to get the "finishing touches" society demanded.

Two years—long, weary years, brightened much at first only by long letters from Elfrida that grew a little shorter and less frequent after awhile, and then the time for her return approached. Jacob Brierly began to count the months, then the weeks, then the days, and at last the day arrived and Miss Steelson was dispatched with a carriage and pair of horses, purchased as a present to welcome the missing one home, to the railway to meet her. She had written to say she would like a carriage and pair to be at the station, "if her dearest uncle could afford it."

He would have gone himself, but he had grown nervous over the prospective meeting. He scorned to doubt Elfrida's affection, he was sure it would be sound in the kernel; but fashionable people and fashionable schools he knew had a way of putting a hard shell outside the heart, which made it difficult to get at.

The life he had led for two years had been, apart from his business, a lone one. At home every night and without society he had acquired a habit of brooding which was not good for either mind or body, and both had suffered. If he were prepared to find a change in Elfrida, it would be well if she were ready to find one in him.

It was in the autumn, close upon winter, and in the evening. Drawn curtains, a brisk fire and a bright chandelier are good accessories to a meeting after a long parting, better than daylight I fancy, and there was a man yearning with a noble love ready to greet the returned Elfrida. All he wanted to know was—how would she meet him?

Every time the sound of wheels in the street beyond the churchyard reached his ear he was at the window listening with all the eager but with a purer longing than that of a lover. Some half-dozen vehicles went by before the one he longed for came.

The sound of horses' hoofs as they pulled up sharply, falling steps, the voice of Miss Steelson, the opening of the outer door, and then he hurried from the drawing-room and went out to greet her.

He did not know her at first—so grown, so changed, so transcendently beautiful, so beyond all he had ever dreamt of or conceived, much as he loved her. Again, so perfectly composed, with all her emotions well under control—not yet eighteen and yet a woman. She gave him both her hands, kissed him, and said something about the train being late and the difference between an English and a foreign climate, of course to the disparagement of our own; and then said she must go and change her dress.

She went upstairs, followed by Miss Steelson, leaving Jacob Brierly in a dazed state of mind. He could not but admire her—any man, old or young, must have done that; but there was almost as wide a gulf between his old affection and admiration as there is between love and hate.

It seemed to him too that the Elfrida he knew as a child was dead and lost to him forever, that she had left him and another appeared in her place. When she came down again he was sitting before the fire with his head between his hands. He did not hear her soft footstep and remained in that attitude, thinking.

She went up to him and said:

"Uncle dear, you are not well?"

Her voice was kind, and for a moment had

something of the old childish ring in it. He looked up with a smile, as much like the Jacob Brierly of ten years before as ever he was to be again.

"No, dearest," he said, "I am in good health, I am only thinking of the change in you. It reminds me that I am getting old."

She laughed merrily, and the servant at that moment announcing dinner she took his arm and led him into the dining-room. It was after all a happy little party of two, a very merry night, the merriest they were ever to spend together on earth from that time forth.

Elfrida had much to say about the school she had left, the people she had known and met during her two years' absence. She made fun of most things, many of her jests having rather a disagreeable twang in Jacob Brierly's ears. But he made allowance for her youth. Levity, he knew, always danced attendance upon the young, and was, more or less, entertained as a companion until thought and experience banished it. Besides, he could not have said an ill-word to her, or openly questioned anything she said or did, she was so beautiful, graceful, and winning.

Have I said enough to show you the change in her? The dawn of it appeared in the garden in the Close almost as soon as she met young Leighton of Buzzard Hall. Elfrida is a weed of rapid growth, and in Elfrida it found congenial soil. All the simplicity of her early life was banished.

He was quite happy when the time came for parting for the night, but as he was kissing her with the love and tenderness of a father a dark shadow came between them. He remembered Mrs. Harvard, and almost without thinking mentioned her.

"I suppose you will go some day to see her," he said.

"I have made an appointment for to-morrow," replied Elfrida. "We have frequently corresponded—once a week at least; and then she kissed him quietly, and left him pale and sad.

During the past year she had written to him but thrice.

After she was gone he rang for a servant and asked if Miss Steelson had retired. Miss Steelson had not, was indeed then busy arranging some of Miss Elfrida's things, and Jacob Brierly desired to see her. Year by year he had learnt to rely more and more upon the advice of his housekeeper, and he wanted her counsel now.

"Elfrida," he said, as soon as they were together, "will want some society, besides such as she will meet at Mrs. Harvard's. What would you advise me to do?"

"You have business friends," replied Miss Steelson, "cultivate them more. They have children who will be fit companions for her. Education has bridged over the gulf between the upper and middle classes. There are as many gentlemen among those who gather the honey as with those who only eat it."

"That is well said," returned Jacob Brierly, with a nod. "There is young Malcolm Gordon for instance. You have seen him."

"A gentleman in the truest sense of the word," replied Miss Steelson; "all the Gordons, indeed, appear to me to have good breeding."

"I believe they are a branch of the great Gordon family," said Jacob Brierly, "but they never speak of it."

"They have no need to boast of their descent."

"No, it is always a folly to boast of anything. But now a difficulty arises. Without a hostess I believe I cannot entertain the right sort of people. Now, if you—"

"Not to be thought of for a moment," interrupted the housekeeper, with a decided dissenting shake of the head. "Who would come to be received by me? I should be worse than nobody, known as I am."

"What, then, am I to do?"

"Perhaps Mrs. Harvard would help you."

"Too old I fear; she seldom goes out at all."

"I do not refer to Mrs. Harvard in person," said Miss Steelson, "but perhaps she may have some relation or friend, a widow or spinster

of mature age who would act as duenna and hostess."

"If it could be done without Mrs. Harvard's assistance—"

"Impossible. Who have you to help you? No, Mr. Brierly, your only course is to consult her."

"I will go with Elfrida to-morrow. I have been very remiss in my visits to Mrs. Harvard, but I think she will forgive me."

"Without a doubt," replied Miss Steelson, in a dry, hard tone. She knew full well how convenience assists in procuring the pardons society gives to those who sin against its laws.

CHAPTER VI.

A CHAPERONE.

Uplift your load again,
Take up the mourning strain,
Sigh deeply and moan.
Lo! your thoughtless loved one
From you is passing on
And leaves you alone.

ELFRIDA did not appear very pleased at the prospect of having her uncle for a companion in her visit to Mrs. Harvard, but she had no ground for raising the slightest objection, and they went together in the afternoon.

It was not reception day and Mrs. Harvard was alone. She received Elfrida with affection, and Jacob Brierly with courtesy. Nothing was said about his not calling, and, put at ease with regard to it, he hastened upon the business which had brought him there.

"I know you will forgive me," he said, "if I ask you to give me the first ten minutes, as I must get back to the factory." At the latter word Elfrida slightly shuddered. "Elfrida will stay longer and the carriage will, of course, remain for her."

They had come together in the carriage, Jacob Brierly feeling very much out of his element, and shrinking back into a corner, as all sensitive natures are apt to do when unduly elevated or thrust into a prominent position; Elfrida sat as composedly as a duchess, trembled but little with any emotion, except a slight feeling of shame at the awkward constraint—so plainly visible—of her uncle.

In a few words—Jacob Brierly seldom wasted words—he laid his idea before Mrs. Harvard, and that lady graciously informed him that his views quite accorded with her own. She knew of several ladies who would be glad to render him the service of playing hostess for him—she might have said living sumptuously at his expense—but a relation was necessary, and there was but one available just then, but it was possible she might be unable to come.

"It is a second cousin of mine," she explained, "the widow of Cundleton Caveall. He was a director of the East India Company, but died without leaving her much. She has only one son, in the Sussex militia, working up for a commission in the regular service, and he will not trouble you, at least not very much."

It was settled Mrs. Caveall should be written to, and Jacob Brierly, with the sense of doubtful relief upon him a man feels when he has done something to give another pleasure and fears he has been injudicious, returned to the factory.

When he came back there was a note from Elfrida saying she had stayed to dine with Mrs. Harvard, who was very dull and lonely, and asking for the carriage to be sent again at nine o'clock.

"Dull and lonely." Well, Jacob Brierly was all that, and Elfrida did not think of it, but then he never mentioned it.

They had a little quiet chat together after she came home, all about Mrs. Harvard and the probable coming of Mrs. Cundleton Caveall.

The next day there was a visitor for Elfrida, Algernon Leighton. Jacob Brierly was away on business, Miss Steelson was engaged, and they had a tête-à-tête.

Had Elfrida been aware of his coming she would, under the circumstances, have been not "at home," but the girl who showed him in

was inexperienced in the world and its ways, and promptly ushered him upstairs without a doubt of its being strictly correct and in every way agreeable to all concerned.

He had changed, as Elfrida had, but the change in him was of a different nature. He was handsomer than ever, but not so pleasing. The bold, confident air of a man who has tasted many of the coarser joys of existence did not sit well upon his young shoulders. He came prepared for a free-and-easy chat with an old friend, and was a little chilled by his reception.

"I heard of your arrival," he said, "and hastened to do you homage."

"It is kind of you," replied Elfrida, unmoved, "but you could have done so to more advantage if you had waited a few days; I shall then have a chaperone. However, I am glad to see you."

"We are such very old friends that I thought I would not stand upon any ceremony."

"I believe we got on very well together, although I cannot call to mind any particular warmth in our communion."

He winced a little, for he had not forgotten the parting at the station during two years of wantonly wasted time and substance. He always admired her, and she had fixed her image in his heart that day by the bright look and gentle pressure of hand she gave him.

"I suppose I have a better memory than you," he said, "or have a stronger reason for hoarding up the little treasures of the past. I assure you there is no part of my life so dear to me as the day when first we met."

"One would think you had been at a Parisian school too," she said, with a tinge of mocking that pained him as the thrust of a fine dart would have done, "but I have got hardened to gentlemen ready to die for me on the slightest provocation. I have had too much of it abroad."

"You went into society there?"

No, but I had many masters, and madame had some male friends. One minute alone with any one of them was sufficient to wring from their lips a declaration of love and imperishable devotion."

"I do not wonder at it," he said, with an admiring glance that appeared, like his words, to be lost upon her.

"You have entered the army?" she said.

"Yes, I have my commission and I am now on leave. I timed my application for it to be here to meet you."

"I suppose I ought to be flattered, Mr. Leighton, but you must forgive me if I am not. Those fickle Frenchmen have quite spoiled me."

He could not make headway with her at all and soon took his leave. He was white with the heat of rage as he went downstairs.

"A fickle jade," he muttered, "grown hard as nails. What a sell it is for me to have been picturing the fun I would have with the pretty Elfrida. By George! she's a woman—a match for any man or woman I know."

After a lapse of four days, a letter, in reply to one sent by Mrs. Harvard, came from that desirable lady, Mrs. Cundleton Caveall. She had no very great objection to the proposal, and only stipulated that she should have two rooms, facing south if possible, entirely her own, where she could receive, and perhaps occasionally entertain, a few private friends.

The house in the church alley was very large and her desire could easily be granted. Two rooms looking out upon the garden were put in order by Miss Steelson, who, with thoughtful care, arranged them with every comfort. In about a week Mrs. Cundleton Caveall arrived.

A lady of fifty-four, unmistakably a lady by birth, but rather unpleasant in manner, tall, with cold, grey eyes, thin, compressed lips, and a way of speaking which warned people to keep aloof. She gave a lifeless hand to Jacob Brierly, bowed to the housekeeper, and took the whole house into custody. To Elfrida she was icily gracious, a frosty chaperone, with emotion just a little thawed.

She did not quite like her rooms. With the utmost politeness she objected to the curtains; they were not quite warm enough, and the hearthrug was too much like the carpet, and

an additional small table would be desirable, and she would like to see her maid at once.

Now here was a pretty pickle for Miss Steelson, for she had not thought of one; but she was equal to the emergency.

"Your maid," she said, "will be here to-morrow, meanwhile Anne, our upper housemaid, is at your service."

Anne was at once brought into requisition and had a hard time of it that day, altering and rearranging the rooms to Mrs. Caveall's taste, and putting away in drawers and the wardrobe the contents of that lady's boxes.

In the kitchen that night she said "she would have given notice on the spot but for poor, dear master, who would want people about him by-and-bye to look after him."

The general impression of the domestics was of a gloomy character. The look of Mrs. Caveall was enough for the cook (she had only caught a glimpse of the back of her dress as she sailed upstairs), and the coachman and footman both opined they were as good as gone.

Poor Jacob Brierly, he had no longer a home. It was only a house very familiar to him, permeated by an atmosphere he found a difficulty in breathing.

Mrs. Cundleton Caveall chilled his dinner that night, and many dinners afterwards, and filled the room with blasts of icy genteel air—but he bore all, and hoped by-and-bye to get accustomed to the change.

Never once, even in his most unhappy moods, did he reproach Carlisle Harvard for the legacy he left him, or attach any blame to Elfrida. He blamed nobody but himself.

"I have shut myself up too much," he thought, "and the world Elfrida loves is beyond me."

Kind, good, honest Jacob Brierly had no more unjust thought than this. He was unjust to himself alone.

In a week Mrs. Caveall was thoroughly settled and was nearly mistress of the whole house.

Miss Steelson, however, quietly kept her position and went on as she had done before.

She provided what was needed without consulting the new-comer, and when that lady suggested anything she first consulted Jacob Brierly and did as he wished.

In all things he yielded, so there was no clashing of arms or other sounds of war.

There was soon a deal of calling at the quiet house, and among the most persevering was a young officer, whom Mrs. Cundleton Caveall considered to be the beau-ideal of what a man ought to be.

It was Algernon Leighton, who had got over the chill of his first reception, and was light-hearted, gay, perfect, polished, and with no more brains than were requisite to carry him about in society; but what he had he used very well.

He could play a part very well, and was much esteemed among those who admired private theatricals.

Some said he was even better than Irving and almost believed it.

He was playing a part now: piqued by Elfrida's cool reception of him he resolved to win her. He had great confidence in himself, having already some reputation for success with the weaker vessels.

In some circles, just below his own, he was spoken of with something amounting to reverence.

We are so apt to think lightly of the vices of our betters.

It was not all smoke; Algernon Leighton had been successful in gaining the heart of more than one girl who, in better hands, would have been an ornament to society, and was proud of his powers. Perhaps, if rightly served, the tarring and feathering so popular in the United States would have been too good for him.

In a great measure, however, his sin was the result of training—such vices as he indulged in were never spoken of among his people as particularly objectionable.

Mrs. Cundleton Caveall occasionally spoke of Algernon Leighton, but she was constantly talking of her son, "dear Stapleton," who, it seemed

was the most unfortunate of men—kept on the militia by a combination of secret enemies, who shut him out from the regular service.

He had been up twice to pass and come back again defeated.

He was the most injured of men, the best of sons, but, as young men will be, a "little wild."

"All young men, good for anything," said Mrs. Caveall, "are a little so."

One day at dinner she brought him up suddenly.

Jacob Brierly was discussing with Elfrida an entertainment he proposed to give when Stapleton was thrust in.

"You do not know my son, Stapleton, I believe, Mr. Brierly?" she said.

"No, I have not that pleasure," replied the yarn factor.

"He intends coming to see me," continued Mrs. Caveall, composedly, "unless you object."

"I object to a son visiting a mother? No."

"He has to come some distance, and not being required with his troop, I asked him to come to Easterley for a month. We have not seen much of each other of late years, and I dote upon him you know, so I should like to see as much of him as possible."

"Of course," said Jacob Brierly, gradually gliding into the trap set for him. "Quite right."

"He has nothing but what I allow him," pursued Mrs. Caveall, "and apartments being expensive perhaps you would not mind my giving up one of my rooms to him during his stay; he will give no trouble—he is a soldier and used to roughing it."

Even Elfrida was a little surprised at this proposition, and the dismay Jacob Brierly felt was visibly depicted upon his face.

But Mrs. Cundleton Caveall apparently did not notice the emotion of either.

She continued her proposition in her usual cold strain:

"One in a house makes very little difference, and Stapleton is sure to be out a great deal, being a great favourite with society. He is very gifted and much sought after by the best people—he sings superbly."

There is no need to dwell upon the subject. Mrs. Cundleton Caveall gained her point, and wrote to Stapleton that very night, enclosing him his bare fare to Easterley.

A passage from her letter may serve to throw a little light upon the position of "dear Stapleton."

"It is no use asking me to pay your debts, for I cannot do it without selling out the little stock I have. That I cannot do until I am certain how long I shall stay here. The girl is sure to marry in a year or two, and then unless I can make another arrangement with Mr. Brierly I must leave. Your extravagance and recklessness are unbounded. Leave at once, quickly, and come here. Give up all your acquaintances or you will have no peace. I cannot have duns calling here."

There is enough of the letter to show pretty plainly how dear Stapleton had been going on; but the concluding words (in a postscript of course) will give us an insight into a mother's schemes for the future. Here they are:

"If you are a very good boy I may be able to find a rich wife for you."

A mother has a perfect right to do the best she can for her family, and any censure upon Mrs. Caveall is unnecessary. Elfrida was almost a stranger to her, there was no love on either side, simply an acquaintance of convenience, and whether her son would make a good husband was a secondary affair to the necessity for getting him a wife with money as soon as possible to keep him from the consequences of recklessly running into debt.

He came promptly and took up his abode in

Jacob Brierly's house—a tall, insipid young fellow of three and twenty, with freckles, very light hair, and a vacant face. He brought with him one light portmanteau, a hat box, a bull terrier, and the odour of very strong cheroots.

(To be Continued.)

THE Marquis of Salisbury has determined to light Hatfield House with the electric light. At most of the great country houses private gas-works are placed. They are expensive and dangerous. The electric light is cheap and safe. It requires, therefore, no prophet to foretell that the electric light will in the end come into almost universal use in country mansions.

FATE OR FOLLY;

OR,

AN ILL-OMENED MARRIAGE.

BY THE AUTHOR OF

"Lady Violet's Victims," "Lord Jasper's Secret," etc., etc.

CHAPTER XXX.

ESTRANGED.

Words and tears are vain;
May God keep thee well;
Turn and kiss me once again—
So farewell!

AFTER a brief leave-taking and more hasty explanations, Sir Herbert hurried off, again to the station, and then ere the married duenna appeared to escort Clarice home she stooped and picked up the bouquet.

Dudley was sincerely glad to be released from a somewhat perilous and uncomfortable situation—he wanted the wings of a bird to enjoy the branches. He descended rapidly from the tree, and was soon out of sight.

As chance would have it both these men, Dudley Ivors and Sir Herbert Tresilian, were fellow-travellers on their return journey to London. Dudley noticed that the master of the Manor House appeared very restless and in deep thought—he appeared busily occupied with papers and letters.

"Can there be a screw loose?" thought the adventurer, as he lighted a cigar, "something wrong with the property?"

Properly after all and not Clarice was the most important part of the business, and he smiled bitterly, glancing from time to time at Sir Herbert, his subtle nature positively enjoying the thought that he held a secret which, if the other only guessed, would rend his heart and darken all his future.

"Ten thousand pounds will set me on my feet again," thinks Dudley, puffing away and building castles in Spain amid the clouds of smoke.

Clarice meanwhile reached the Manor House in a dazed, bewildered state of mind. She sent all sorts of polite messages by the lady who returned home with her to the guests she felt too ill to seek and bid goodbye to.

This second blow—the fear of losing that vast inheritance to gain which she had sacrificed honour, truth and principle—wholly unnerved her, for the telegram that had been sent that morning to Sir Herbert was from Sergeant Sizer, who had gathered together those many missing links regarding Lilian, and now held them in his clever, unscrupulous hands—Sizer, who boasted he had never yet lost a case, provided the parties left him alone to work it up in his own way.

It might be an expensive affair, but then it was always effectual.

When she gained her bedroom she did not, as usual, ring to summon her maid—Mary's presence could do nothing to comfort her. She realized that in future she must stand or fall

alone, and confession to the man she loved, and whom she must for ever leave, must be made. Dudley would have probably written something in this bouquet.

She tore the flowers apart with eager haste. Curled round the wire and stems was his letter.

Clarice read it slowly through from beginning to end, and the man's villainy had never, perhaps, been more forcibly displayed than in the cool, scientific way in which he weighed events and calculated on results.

She was his victim and his wife, in the eyes of the law. She was lost for ever in society were exposure made, but the thought that Dudley would be disappointed and balked of possession gave her a thrill of morbid pleasure.

Sitting in her comfortably low-cushioned chair, Clarice tried to think it all out coolly, but nothing was clear to her reason—a great anguish dried up all the forces and powers of her mind.

Heavens! how she loved Sir Herbert! Was this to be her punishment? She would have to go away from all the warmth and comfort and peace of her home and live among strangers in penury and banishment.

And now the tears fell. Never more would they stand together by the window watching the shadows on the lawn, or listening to the voice of the nightingale in the woods. The sweet dream was over—her life was all spoilt and marred.

"I will make reparation by my confession," she muttered, "and be no longer a living lie. The storms of worldly contempt, the icy blast of others' displeasure and scorn must wither me in my youth for this sin I have committed, and I shall be quite alone in the world at last."

Pale and motionless, and with a piteous quiver about the mouth, Clarice sat alone, hour after hour, this sweet summer evening. That first mistake of her girlhood—what bitter fruit it had brought!

"Poverty would be nothing to face—it is the thought of his disappointment and scorn of me," she moaned, walking up and down the room, Dudley's letter spread out before her on the table. How near the sight of that writing seemed to bring him!

We may be for ever parted from a person, but take up a letter from them, the mere touch of the paper, which their hands have pressed, brings them so clearly before us, and we remember the days when their hands clasped ours and their eyes met ours, as if their photograph and not their writing had stirred recollection so keenly.

The loss of money seemed nothing to her in comparison with the loss of love. Both miseries seemed likely to beset her together.

Another long, tedious night had to be faced, and then at about twelve o'clock the following morning Dudley had arranged on a meeting.

"It will be at the entrance of Beecher Wood at 12," he wrote. "Do not fail to be there."

Clarice suddenly felt her fortitude give way. She began to long for her wealth that she might bribe Dudley and get rid of him. Her old weakness of character returned, and the resolve to make atonement for his sin by confession, which had given her dignity and courage, momentarily faded.

"Is Sir Herbert coming here to-night, my lady?" her maid here asked, opening the door softly and stealing to her side.

"No," said Clarice, with a quick-drawn sigh.

"Are you ill, my lady? Shall I get you a cup of tea?" the girl asked. "You looked that bad this morning, I feared you would not be able to go to the picnic."

Clarice rose to her feet.

"I have seen my husband, Dudley Ivors," she said, and Mary detected the trembling of her frame.

"And won't he come to terms, my lady?"

Clarice lifted her arms with a gesture of pain, and then her head sank low on her breast.

"There are no terms to offer," she said, with a wintry smile, "for there will be no money."

"No money, my lady! Are you mad? You'd never believe the threats of that crazy creature, Alice Ray?"

"In all this I see the hand of fate," Clarice went on, dreamily. "I was a poor, motherless child, living with people I despised, when Sir Richard took it into his head to adopt me. No one had ever taught me right from wrong—not clearly, so that I understood. My father was a great scholar, but he shut himself away from every one's sight, declaring his life was a failure, and detesting mankind in his heart. Sudden luxury and good fortune turned my head. I fancied I held a charmed life—that all sorrow and harm would be kept from me. But I met Dudley, and he has ruined me body and soul."

"Don't give way like this, my lady. Rally your courage and look things in the face. Give him the money he wants, keep your position in society, and let him go."

"Ah! you don't understand," said Clarice, with new light in her eyes, and her bowed figure became erect as something glowed within her. "And you talk of society to me now—now, when I am going to tear off the disguise and reveal myself to them all in my true colours!"

"And what will be your doom, my lady?"

"Death, most likely. My folly will have killed me. Oh! Mary, I do so love him. When I think of him my resolution fails. I feel weak—heart-broken; but it must be."

Will love make her heroic at last—patient, long-suffering, and true? It is woman's nature to change. But will the earnestness and intensity of her love bring out the latent fervour of her soul, and give her a noble purpose in life?

"What a blow it will be for master," said Mary, with a servant's view of things, thinking her mistress foolish to throw up the game without a greater struggle.

"And he will be so poor again," said Clarice, with a shiver. "And he is ambitious."

"Is it, indeed, true that Sir Richard's daughter has been found, my lady?"

Mary had begun to consider her own personal interests, which were involved with those of her mistress. Where would the capital be found to start that promising public-house in Alder-tree Lane, supposing the real heiress succeeded to her inheritance?

Clarice for answer went to a bureau and took out Lillian's likeness in the old velvet case. She sat with it before her for a few seconds, gazing at the features of this girl who had at last arisen to dash the golden cup and its contents from her hand.

"I am quite certain she is found," Sir Herbert will be more fully acquainted with all the details soon; and now leave me. I would rest," Clarice answered.

She felt too weak and broken for more conversation.

The next morning dawned in soft and balmy splendour. She could hardly bear to watch the unveiling of the rosy Eastern light. Clarice fancied the lawns and terrace-gardens of the Manor House had never looked more home-like and inviting. The peacocks sunned themselves on the lawn, doves flew by her windows with their plaintive song, all her favourite flowers seemed awake to greet her with a welcome in the morning light. She dearly loved the Manor House.

As Sir Herbert, in a West-end hotel, woke vexed, discomfited, and anxious regarding his coming interview with his lawyers and the sergeant, Clarice was dreading her meeting with Dudley Ivors.

At eleven she sauntered out into the gardens; she felt suffocated indoors. The sweet air revived her, but there was not an atom of colour in her face. Something seemed to chill and check the very life-blood of her heart.

Almost mechanically she turned her steps towards the entrance of Beecher Wood. Despair is strong, and Clarice, onward as she morally was, had begun to grow reckless.

Dudley was here sure enough waiting for her. He was leaning carelessly against the gnarled trunk of a tree as usual smoking. And they had never met since that evening amid the meadows. She covered her face with a groan, as though the sight of him was more than she could bear. That handsome, evil face, that treacherous, shallow heart.

"You don't seem particularly pleased to see me this morning, my wife," said Dudley, eyeing her keenly. "Is this the only welcome I'm to have?"

What is the meaning of this stern, frozen manner, this awful dumb trembling? There is no disdain or triumph here. This is not the manner of a proud and worldly woman prepared to make terms and keep an enemy at bay, and her position secure in the world's eyes.

"You got my letter all right, I suppose," he said, while she stood pallid and statue-like before him.

"Yes," said Clarice, in a low but steady voice, "I got the letter, but I came to tell you that you cannot have the money."

He wheeled on her with a furious oath. His bold eyes quailed before hers; he read something defiant in their expression that disquieted him even as he knew he had her in his power.

"I cannot have the money?" he repeated, half mocking. "Come, come, my dear, that isn't business—that won't do. You want to get off, you little miser, and limit me to a miserable five thou—eh?"

"You can have nothing," she said, glancing away from him towards the towers of her home, the home from which she must so soon be banished.

"What you don't mean to say you want to be my fond and faithful wife, do you?" he said, brutally, "that you're going in for piety, confession, atonement, and all that? You gave me to understand the other night that I was repulsive to you, and you've cooled me down by your reception. No, Clarice, keep your head steady, and above all don't be an hysterical baby; you are my wife, well and good, but no one knows it. You love this beggar who's divided the property with you. Well, give me a fair share, child, and I'll never trouble either of you again."

He had spoken this very quietly and deliberately, expecting some answering response that would fit in with his views.

"It's no use, Dudley, to talk to me like that," she said, faintly. "We have lost our money—at least, I expect so. Sir Richard's own daughter, Lillian, has been found. She will succeed to every penny. It is true there is a small sum set apart for me in the will, but you will not have it as hush-money. I shall confess the truth to Sir Herbert Tresilian on his return to the Manor House to-day."

Dudley laughed a harsh, savage, vindictive laugh.

"So the game's up at last, my lady," he said, thrusting his hands in his pockets, and kicking a pebble from the root of the tree with his foot. "I see you're resolved to carry out this suicidal policy."

Is that a man's step approaching through the tangled underwood and winding path of the wood?

"Something moved, didn't it?" said Dudley, looking around, then concluding he was nervous, he laughed again and seized Clarice's arm. "So you think perhaps I want you, pale victim," he said; but there was no passion in his voice to-day; he looked cruel, threatening, disappointed. "A nice comforter you'd make in poverty, wouldn't you?—a wonderful help-mate for a poor man in Australia or the Backwoods, for instance, where a strong arm and an active body are worth pounds of fine-ladyism. And you'll go on your knees to this lover you're so precious fond of, and say, 'I've never been your wife—I've never—'"

"Is this necessary?" said Clarice, feebly. "Is it manly, when I'm so wretched, to goad me thus?"

"No, but it's just," said Dudley, flinging her from him. "I've been punished; I've been imprisoned, while you enjoyed yourself; you never cared to see me, or asked after me, you faithless traitress! My wife!—a pretty wife indeed, and silly and weak enough to drag any man down."

"It may not take long for me to sink into my wretched grave!" she said, staggering backward.

Then someone here came suddenly between them, at sight of whom even Dudley uttered a sharp cry.

It was Sir Herbert Tresilian.

Clarice's head bent lower. She trembled now from head to foot; her eyes closed, and she nearly fell.

"Is this true?" asked Sir Herbert, hoarsely, turning to Dudley, who after his first surprise assumed his old, hardened, defiant air—"true that Clarice is indeed your wife?"

"She'd better answer that herself," said Dudley, characteristically, kicking the pebble further away.

"I appeal to you," said the master of the Manor House.

"Yes—she's my wife right enough," he said, insolently, "as the marriage laws are at present constituted, and I was unfortunately nabbed on our wedding-day. I could of course sue for a divorce if I pleased and play the very deuce with you both, but I'll be reasonable. I'm ready to come to business."

"Are you then so false and wicked a woman as this?" asked Sir Herbert, turning to her where she stood white and wild before him. "I have often mistrusted you, Clarice, but I have loved you always."

His words wounded her like lashes. She covered and turned aside—something dark and dim came over her senses.

"I am ready to leave you," she said, lifting her hands with a gesture of entreaty.

"You may not know that I am a poor man again, Mr. Dudley Ivors," said Sir Herbert, calmly. "But I would wish her left in peace and protected from you, if such is her desire. The matter is so distressing, so agonizing, that scandal and calumny and insult could perhaps hardly make it worse. But if these could be saved, for her sake—"

"If you pay him he will never care; and I will go away," she muttered. "The world will talk of the mystery of our lives, but it will not know the truth—and he may spare me that."

"To cut an unpleasant interview short," said Dudley, who detested scenes, "I'll say communicate in future with me through my lawyers, Blackburn and Blackburn, Furnival's Inn. I've no wish to appropriate the lady—a luxurious doll is no use to a man who has to earn his own living. Good-morning."

And he turned on his heel.

Alas! the terrible consequences of wrongdoing, the miserable results of deceit and sin. She did not dare to glance at Sir Herbert—her breast heaved and dimmer grew all sense.

At last he approached her and rested one hand on her shoulder.

In that terrible silence they seemed to hear each other's heart-beats only.

"Never my wife," he whispered. "Ah! little Clarice, unpardoned you must be—but so dear."

In those simple words the strong man's agony found vent. Disgrace, separation, failure, he saw those hateful shadows climbing the hill of pain and difficulty with him side by side. And he was a proud and ambitious man—no blot had ever before rested on the name of the Tresilians.

He thought that this blight might be a judgment on him for the worldliness that had first prompted him to woo Clarice. The love, the awful, burning, passionate love had come after, and they were going to leave each other for ever.

Just as he had grown alive to ambition this love came and took his heart by storm. The interests of life blended with it, and there had been no follies or vicious intrigues on his part. His feelings were ardent and fresh as a boy's, though he was in the matured prime of life.

She had been his—she had lain in his arms, his breast had pillowed her head in sleep—they had tasted together of the intensity and rapture of love, it had been like some sweet drugged dream.

His soul, his manhood, cried out against the decree of banishment which honour, which necessity enforced.

"I meant to confess," Clarice said, in a low broken voice, gaining courage to address him as

she felt his touch. His presence filled her with overwhelming emotions. "I should have told you the truth had you not heard this morning. I do not expect you to forgive me. But I will try and atone all my life long."

His eyes were dim with tears as he listened. "You thought by this crime to have secured wealth for us both for ever," Sir Herbert said, in his soft pained voice. "But see how fate has ever been too strong for us. The inheritance is no longer ours—it belongs to Lilian."

She shivered, but nothing now could add to her wretchedness.

"Lilian!" she repeated, "the fair-haired girl who came here—Rupert's wife—Sir Richard's daughter? And is all then clearly proved?"

"So clear indeed that a trial would only be money, time, and labour wasted," he said. "But I hardly regret the loss of the estate, Clarice; I could almost welcome this blow, since it may help me to forget you."

"No, no, don't forget me," she pleaded. "That I could not bear. The doom will be hard enough, God knows, and I shall pray to die."

And after this they passed along the wood together in silence.

CHAPTER XXII.

"100 MORE."

The rocks of the earth and the walls
Are weak as foam on the sea;
In the heart is the way of the gods,
Who calmly accept, not hands.

Sir Herbert was awakened at the uproar and confusion that were going on at the Manor House as he and Clarice early entered it for the last time.

The faces of guests appeared at the window, servants were hurrying to and fro. Major-General Rankin's phaeton was being driven away to the stables, the Armingtons' brougham and pair were at the hall door.

"They have heard about Lilian!" he thought, with a sharp pang. "They have come to console with me, but in reality they are like the courtiers who flattered about the dying monarch ready to cry:

"The king is dead! Long live the king!"

His heart was full of bitterness, he could have borne that parting from Clarice better in soft stillness and unbroken calm, but this—

They soon perceived him and several passed out of the drawing-rooms to meet him on the terrace.

Clarice felt that terrible chill which the forsaken too well understand; she glided to her room by another entrance, she fancied in her nervous dread that they had come to reproach her, and that the scorn she so dreaded might dash over her defenceless head.

"Is it possible the news is true and that Lilian has been discovered at last?" Major-General Rankin was saying, slipping his arm in Sir Herbert's, and then his wife's feeble soprano muttered:

"How very wonderful if it should be really all correct and no imposture. George has been summoned by the lawyers as a witness, and he is very anxious indeed about it; as a friend of dear Sir Richard's he wishes to see justice done his daughter."

"Justice shall be done," Sir Herbert answered, quietly. "I have no wish to keep anyone out of their rights, my brother is indeed far worthier of success than I."

How proudly he said it, his hand thrown slightly back, his firm mouth pale and set.

"Deuced disappointing for you, old fellow," said the Major-General, sympathetically, who thought Sir Herbert showed pluck and took it very well, "but there is a sum set apart you know for yourself and wife under the will, providing the real heiress should be found."

"Yes, I know," he said, coldly—a darker shadow than poverty hung over him and his house.

"I hear she sawfully no," here Miss Armington cried, wishing to be noticed. "Of course I could hardly judge of her when I saw her here that evening with your brother, she looked rather

awkward and frightened, but I daresay she's been kept down by circumstances."

Sir Herbert was leaning against the carved antique mantel-piece, his eyes scarcely seeing the familiar objects of the drawing-room.

"And dear Lady Tresilian, how is she?" asked Miss Armington, starting up.

She was accompanied by the Hon. Charles Molyneux, who had proposed and been accepted at the picnic yesterday.

"I really think I must have a talk to Clarice."

Sir Herbert stirred here, and the colour left his cheek.

"Better not," he said, anxious to guard Clarice from worldly comfort, "she is severely indisposed, she begs to be left entirely alone."

"Ah! takes it to heart I've no doubt," said the major-general, fustily, "women kick at an allowance when they've revelled in thousands."

"But she will keep the jewels, I suppose," his wife said, smiling at her salts and mentally appraising the value of some of the furniture. If there should be a sale here by-and-bye she will certainly bid for the Chippendale cabinet and the Eastham mirrors.

"The family jewels will be given to Lilian," said Sir Herbert, disgusted at the want of taste and judgment shown.

He was picturing the agony of the poor girl above—her passionate tears, her dull despair.

He was heartily glad when after some more discussion the guests withdrew, their curiosity satisfied.

Then there were the servants to face, who were talking and spread about in little groups. Mrs. Steele, looking very red and excited, was saying how delighted she felt justice was going to be done her darling, and grow quite maudlin over her description of Lilian's extreme youth.

"And I'm glad indeed that sly old will be turned out of the Manor House at last," said the housekeeper. "I never could abide her; she wheedled herself into master's affections and got the money, and now they say Lady Allington has recognised our Miss Lilian. Bless her heart, won't we give her a welcome home again, that's all!"

A few sentences of this pleasant kind fell on Sir Herbert's ears. But a few days ago he had been so happy—he and Clarice united, prosperity surrounding them, and now the withering truth had to be faced, that he had lost everything that makes life bearable.

His friend, the Hon. Charles, stopped back from the rest, and, coming close to Sir Herbert, warmly wrung his hand.

"I've not said much, old fellow, but perhaps I've felt the more. I can only say you've my truest sympathy, and if you will only always look on me as a friend—"

"Thanks, Molyneux, I know your good heart," Sir Herbert answered. "Perhaps, however, it's all for the best, you know; I must look further afield for a living, and shan't be so likely to rust away in idleness."

After they had all gone Sir Herbert shut himself in the library to try and regain calmness.

The woman he so loved, beautiful Clarice, had been guilty of a wicked and a cruel fraud, for which the law could punish and degrade her. It was the worst blow he could have received. She had ruined both their lives—his own existence must be in future enshrouded with that deadly apathy which kills in the end so slowly but so surely.

His tortured soul could find no hope, no comfort in any thought—for his indignation brought no consolation to his heart; they were parted, he and Clarice, from this day.

He could hear her pacing the room above, getting ready, no doubt, for her departure.

"What will she do? What will become of her?" he mused.

He knew how desperate miserable women often grew, especially women of her soft, voluptuous nature, to whom pleasure is as natural and necessary as light and air.

Clarice had drawn aside the costly hangings of her bedroom window and had seen the Armingtons and the Rankins drive away. She

watched them in mute, tearless grief, and then a new thought possessed her. She walked into Sir Herbert's little room, where he kept his guns, fishing tackle, waips, books, and other masculine accouters, and looked steadily up at a brace of loaded pistols above the mantel-piece.

They seemed to draw her to them, and she regarded them with the air of one who sees sudden relief from maddening pain.

"Why not?" she whispered, "why should not I—"

She turned aside, covering her face and touching the favourite chair Sir Herbert used. A book was open on the table. Here were the honeysuckles and roses in the little jar she herself had placed for him.

She remembered how often she had crept to his side here, and wound her arms about his neck as he read.

"Oh, heavens! how shall I atone?" she cried, and kissed the chair, forgetting that the pistols had beckoned her to death.

"You must live to prove you are capable of endurance and strain," an inner voice whispered, "a leaden bullet is the refuge of a coward."

She returned to her chamber and found Mary at her side. She was crying as she clasped the hem of Clarice's dress.

"They're all saying in the servants' hall that Miss Lilian has been found," said the girl, excitedly, "and that all the property will go to her. Aunt Steele is delighted. She don't know of your trouble in leaving master; she only thinks you're dressing and going away on account of the real heiress."

"It is hard," said Clarice, writhing, "it seems almost more than I can bear."

"You will let me come with you, my lady?" cried Mary, sobbing. "I'm very fond of you, I won't want any wages—only to be with you and wait on you."

This affection wrung Clarice's heart, but she knew that she must be alone in her atonement.

"I'm sure if only Sir Richard was alive and could see you at this moment he'd forgive you anything; he cared for you—he'd never wish you to be driven out of the old Manor House like this."

"Don't speak of Sir Richard to me now or you'll drive me mad. I deceived him. I am glad he is at rest, and will never know," Clarice said, quivering, "dear, kind man, how little I deserved all his goodness."

She started here, feeling herself conquered by anguish, a great longing seized her to walk once more through the gardens of her old home and say good-bye to everything.

"Then will you be quite alone, dear lady? No maid to wait upon you or dress your hair? Might I, then, kiss your dear hand for the last time? and I'll say God bless you always, wherever you be."

"Don't, please," said Clarice, her white, cold lips quivering, "you break my heart, Mary. Thank you so much," she said, simply, "and now is all ready?"

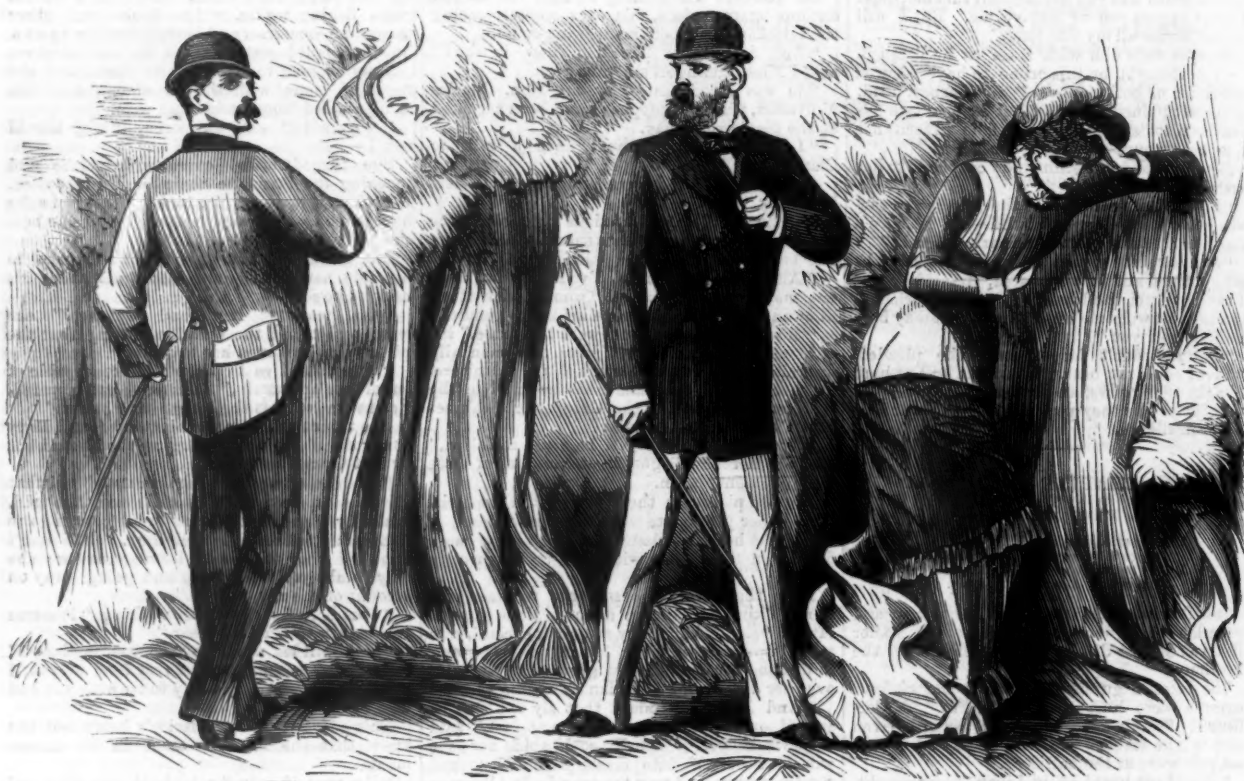
She had a purpose in her mind—this poor, weak Clarice. She would go to Lilian—to Lilian, the long-lost child of her adopted father, Sir Richard Allington.

"She will be kind, sweet, and forgiving," said Clarice, remembering the soft voice of the girl she herself had welcomed here. "She is a woman and she will pity me and help me to live such a life as will please him."

She meant Sir Herbert, to whom farewell must now be said. She bent down and helped Mary tighten the strap of her travelling portmanteau.

But first for a mouthful of fresh air to keep her from fainting. She went quickly and lightly down the wide stone stairs and straight out on to the lawn. She gathered a few roses and some scented geranium leaves; the doves still cooed above her head, the happiness of all other innocent things seemed cruel to her in her present mood.

Then she returned to the house, and opening the library door went close up to the man who had been even more to her than a husband, who was in truth her life.



[THE OLD LOVE AND THE NEW.]

"Herbert," she said, kneeling down by his side; "I have come to say good-bye."

She must, after this, ever worship him humbly at a distance—a memory and a shrine where thought found an indescribable mingling of rapture and of pain.

That beloved head! It was bowed on his hands, which she clung to and kissed for the last time.

"Clarice," he said, softly, without glancing at her, "it is bitter. You have robbed me of faith and hope. Ah, dear heart, why did you do it?"

Lower she bent in silence, afraid to trust herself with words. The wind from the opened window lightly moved her hair.

"I was afraid to let Sir Richard know," she whispered. "I thought good would come from evil, for the cloud that threatened me was ruin and poverty, and I was so sure he would not claim me or if he did could have been bought over. All this was weak and wicked—it was like a house built upon sand, some day it must have fallen and buried me beneath."

"You must have loved him very much to have married him," he said.

"It was the infatuation of a moment—mere girlish folly. I have learnt since what real love is, because you, you alone are heaven to me. Remember that as long as I live my love will last. But how, how will my broken heart comfort you?"

He gazed at her then, weighing her in an invisible balance.

"And yet it is good-bye, Clarice, that we must say—only that. Regrets are vain. We cannot forget, but we must part."

"Yes, yes, I know," she said, unwinding her arms from about his throat. "I love you—good-bye."

He held her close to his breast and kissed her on the brow. Her tears fell upon his hands, and in one she left a rose and the scented geranium leaves.

"Where do you mean to live?" he asked, after a silence, broken only by her sobs.

"I am going to Lilian," she said, withdrawing herself from him. "I think he would have wished it. There is mercy in heaven over any sinner that repents."

He knew then that she alluded to Sir Richard.

"And I shall never come back to you," she cried, gliding towards the door. "Winter and summer will pass and I shall be alone—alone. Good-bye. If I were but a bird or flower to be near you sometimes! Good-bye."

The door closed softly behind her and then he knew they were indeed parted. Life would go on as usual in its hard material way, but never more would these two feel the unity of soul with soul.

He touched the flower and leaves almost mechanically, and then put them aside in his desk. He knew what sharp agony the memory of them must ever give him. It is the sight of relics like these that drives men and women mad.

"And thus to lose wife, home, wealth, and fame," he muttered. "What a strange fate. All swept away from me like leaves down some swollen mountain torrent."

He was to have gone in for a parliamentary career. Great things were prophesied of his future, but without money he was in reality bound hand and foot.

And yet he was too noble to envy Rupert, his brother, the sudden good fortune with which fate in its caprice had crowned him. No one better deserved success than Rupert, who had wedded Lilian from the purest affection, little dreaming she was the lost heiress.

As he sat in silent gloom in the library a cab dashed to the door, and out of it sprang Rupert. Grimson admitted him with the peculiar respect of a butler for a new master, and Sir Herbert, hearing his brother's voice, came towards him from the library.

"Do you remember that I once told you if an

opportunity should ever arise in our lives of proving my gratitude for your kind reception of myself and wife I should not fail to seize it!" Rupert asked, holding his brother's hand as they entered the library together.

"You were ever kind and generous, Rupert," said Sir Herbert, a glow lighting his pallid face.

"You accept the evidence offered, Bertie, that identifies Lilian," Rupert said, eagerly. "We have your letter rendering a trial unnecessary. But if you still have doubts—"

"No, my dear fellow, I have none. It is not that which so distresses me—not the loss of the estates. May you both live long to enjoy them is the sincerest wish of my heart."

Rupert perceived some other fresh cause was at work, differing entirely from Sir Herbert's former agitation.

"Why, Bertie, old man, now I look at you you are strangely changed for the worst. You've had some great mental shock, have you not, since I saw you but a few hours ago?"

"Yes," Sir Herbert answered, with a shiver. "I have lost Clarice."

"Lost Clarice, your wife? Why, where is she?"

"She never was my wife, Rupert."

"Are you mad, old fellow? Not your wife? Why, I was invited to the wedding, and heard a graphic account of it all from Lady Tresilian."

"But she had been previously married to Dudley Ivors."

"Great Heavens, this is awful."

"It is, indeed; worse than anything in the world. We were so happy," said his brother.

Then Sir Herbert briefly explained the particulars of Dudley's imprisonment and return, the meeting in the wood, and Clarice's confession.

Presently they saw her pass the window. "She is going to London," Sir Herbert said, wearily. "Some instinct draws her to Lilian."

(To be Continued.)



[ROSE'S CONQUEST.]

FLORINDA'S BRIDAL. (A COMPLETE STORY.)

CHAPTER I.

"My dear Florinda, I want to talk with you," said Mr. Loraine to his ward, Lady Florinda Delaney, as that young girl was about to follow his niece, Rose Myers, from the dining-room, which the servants had not long quitted. Lady Florinda at once obeyed the mandate that thus arrested her steps, but there was a startled, nervous look in her lovely features which betokened the anticipation of some vexatious topic in the coming dialogue.

She was scarcely subject to such timidity. To judge from her appearance and bearing, graceful and stately as the descendant of a race noted for beauty as well as ancient blood should be, and her regular and proudly cut features, Florinda certainly seemed born to command rather than to obey, to defy rather than dread the yoke.

And yet her guardian had less trouble in managing his high-born and richly endowed ward than in controlling his gay and volatile, fairy-like niece, Rose.

At least, so she believed, and so to all outward seeming had been the case, till the present time, when the girls were on the eve of completing respectively their seventeenth and eighteenth years, and of entering into the world, at which they only had as yet had a peep—a mere bird's-eye view.

Rose was a Valentine, and Lady Florinda had first seen the light on a bright sunny May day, while the date on which Mr. Loraine made the anxious request for a serious and private conversation was a frosty evening at the close of January.

Lady Florinda therefore had some cause to

believe that the interview would relate to the crisis now at hand. Nor was she mistaken.

"My dear," began the old gentleman, "I want to recall to you what I believe you have already been informed of, that ere your eighteenth birthday you will have to ratify the contract on which the possession of your fortune depends."

Florinda gave a slight shiver, which, however, was not perceived by her engrossed companion.

"I mean, my dear, that by the terms of your godfather's will you are to espouse Lionel Mordaunt, your cousin by marriage. The reason of this peculiar condition, no doubt, was that the disposition of his property, which, owing to his early love for your mother, was made in your favour, should still return to his own family. He was very strenuous that you should be prevented from any chance of breaking this condition by forming any girlish fancy. And I flatter myself that I have fulfilled my duty so well that you will be fully prepared to receive Lionel Mordaunt as your future husband on his arrival at Loraine Grange."

Lady Florinda listened with admirable self-control, and calmly replied:

"May I ask why Colonel Mordaunt has never made the least attempt to become acquainted with me? His very absence in India was scarcely necessary. One would imagine he might have given me some opportunity to judge of him for myself. What will be the consequence if I decline the honour?"

"That, my dear, instead of ten thousand a year, you will only have your own ten thousand pounds which you get from your father. But, of course, such madness was not to be thought of, especially when a nice young fellow like Lionel Mordaunt is in the case. So now you understand, my love. Colonel Mordaunt will arrive in a few weeks, and the wedding, by the terms of the will, must be on or before your eighteenth birthday."

"One moment, my dear sir," said Lady Florinda, as the old gentleman drew out his India handkerchief, a sure preliminary to his

afternoon nap. "What will become of the money if the wedding do not take place?"

"If the colonel refuse you will retain it with certain restrictions on your choice of a husband, but if you refuse it is to be devoted to a hospital for women in memory of your mother. So now run away, my love."

Lady Florinda took the hint and left the room to encounter Rose Myers bounding down the staircase to meet her.

The very incarnation of brightness and wilfulness was that lovely little fairy with her sparkling violet eyes, her dark chestnut hair, her ruby lips, and cream-tinted skin.

She was vivacious and wayward, but sweet and loving, and was alternately the torment and the delight of everyone around her of any age and either sex.

"Flo, what is it? You look as if you had been in the cave of Triphonius," she exclaimed, as she linked her arm in her friend's and drew her into the small drawing-room where they usually sat.

"It is too hopeless to jest about, Rose," sighed Lady Florinda, sinking down on a chair in the recess. "Your uncle has coolly informed me that I am to be married on my birthday, just with as complete a matter-of-course air as if he was talking of my being presented at Court."

"Enchanting! what heaps of dresses and diamonds, orange blossoms and ovations will be showered on your devoted head," exclaimed Rose, gaily. "It's like opening the door to a peep-show."

"Do be serious for once, Rose; you know how miserable it will make me," said Florinda, half-indignantly.

"My darling Flo, remember you have only informed me abruptly of the catastrophe at hand. How can I give you a proper amount of sympathy?" returned Rose.

"Because I am to marry Lionel Mordaunt," sighed Florinda.

"Well, bellissima, I daresay he is very charming."

"I only remember him as a priggish, consequential man, looking with contempt on a school miss," was the haughty reply.

"Yes; and, besides, Lady Flo, there are others so much more charming," said Rose, archly.

"It is cruel to speak of that, Rose. I ought to have checked the folly on his part and my own," returned Florinda, impatiently.

"Florinda, are you serious?" asked Rose, with a grave disapproval quite new to her gay features.

Lady Florinda did not reply for some minutes.

"Am I not right, Rose?" she said, at length.

"If you mean that you are going to marry one man while you are in love with another, I think it is a great pity that you did allow Leo Franks, a poor artist, to fall in love with you. It must have been mere surface affection, or you could not give up poor Leo so coolly."

"No, no; do not think so hastily of me," said Lady Florinda, with tears in her eyes. "I know I did wrong to carry on any such intercourse with a stranger, only I—I could not help—"

"Loving him. Oh, Flo!" supplied Rose, as the proud girl stopped in her confession.

Had it been Leo Franks himself Florinda could scarcely have been more abashed at the avowal of her feelings.

"Poor dear Flo, I do feel for you from my heart. But why not give it all up and be happy? I am sure Leo Franks is clever and persevering, and you know Mrs. Harper thought highly of his talents, and ten thousand pounds will be a good beginning."

"Dearest Rose," said Lady Florinda, in a tone of quiet despair, "I cannot, with honour, do such a thing. If this fortune which was left to me by my godfather from his unselfish love for my mother and thus taken from his own sister's children, be not returned to them by my marriage with the natural heir, it is to go to a hospital. Were it otherwise, I would relinquish it and the unwelcome bridegroom at once."

"This Lionel Mordaunt is his sister's son?" asked Rose.

"Yes, the son of the eldest sister. Now you see I should do wrong to both Colonel Mordaunt and Leo Franks by the plan you propose. I can but be wretched, but I will not make any one else so," she went on.

"Not even Leo Franks. Now, if it were me," said Rose, "I should have teased Uncle Mark into letting me marry him or else run away, which would have been ten times as romantic," said Rose, demurely, as the slow step of her approaching uncle broke off the conversation.

And while the girls give him their usual quota of music it may be as well to make more intelligible the allusions in the aforementioned dialogue.

Mr. Lorraine had said truly. He had taken most especial care and surveillance of the fair heiress committed to his charge.

But the best-laid plans of mice and men
Gang aft agley.

And Mr. Lorraine was no exception to the rule. He had entrusted his ward and niece on their recovery from a severe attack of measles to the care of an invalid lady going abroad for her health. Nothing could be better and safer.

Mrs. Harper was herself too delicate for society, and in the secluded district where she purposed to spend her absence from England it would be next to impossible that harm could arise. But danger lurks where least expected.

An accident introduced a portrait painter to Mrs. Harper, and he took a likeness of her for her nephew. Then he was employed for Lady Florinda.

The natural result followed.

Day after day they talked and gazed, till at last the fatal hour came and the electric spark flew from one to the other of the young hearts.

"Florinda, forgive," he had said, in broken accents.

"There is nothing to forgive—nothing," she murmured.

"At least you will remember that there is one who can love without hope," he returned.

He had won her first fresh love, and she was no ordinary impulsive nature, and when his hand pressed hers and placed in it a small miniature of himself, there was a thrill through every pulse of her soul.

Now what was to be the result?

Rose Myers lay awake in fertile fancies and imaginings such as only a young and romantic spirit could conceive. To come to the rescue, to save misery to two fond lovers, was her ardent desire.

But how to accomplish it was more than even those waking hours and that daring brain could for the present see in the misty future. Three short months and the crisis must come.

"I must see Charlie about it, that's certain," was the young lady's last conclusion, ere she went to sleep. "If he can help me, poor fellow, I am sure he will."

The said "Charlie" was the son of the vicar of the parish, and, owing to an early injury he had received, his life was debarred from any active exertion.

He had, as the young lady pretty well knew, cherished a hopeless love for the bright Rose, whose sunny temper and sweet ways were cheering to his gloomy life.

But, beyond assisting her in all her fancies, such as superintending her attempts to draw from nature and giving her instructions on the organ, Charlie Vivian had never given the slightest sign of the passion that was the chief interest rather than the sorrow of his monotonous life.

The next morning she announced her intention of driving her pony chaise over to the vicarage, and taking Charlie to a ruin in the neighbourhood she wanted to sketch under his guidance. And, as usual, she carried her point, although snow was on the ground, a phenomenon she declared highly favourable to her purpose.

"Now, Charlie, you must help me—indeed you must," she said, as the carriage was again in motion.

"You know there is nothing I would not attempt to show my gratitude to you, Rose, but in this case it seems hopeless."

"Will you promise me to keep quite secret what I ask you to do, and to obey me without questioning?" she said, holding up her finger playfully.

"I will certainly keep your secret, Rose, and if it is possible carry out your wishes, but remember this is a very serious matter. Lady Florinda would reproach you afterwards, when she had lost her fortune; and, besides, Mr. Lorraine would blame us for the failure of his plans."

"But I do not mean to be so clumsy as that, Charlie," she replied, gaily, "and all that I want is that you receive any letters I desire to be sent to you; and next that you will persuade your aunt, Mrs. Harper, to invite me for a short visit when I want to go away. That is not so desperate a measure, is it, dear Charlie?" And, oh, fancy what it must be to be married, to have one you do not care for and love some one else!

Poor fellow! He knew but too well what a hopeless passion must be, but he only answered calmly:

"You are right, Rose, anything than that."

CHAPTER II.

THE post bag for Lorraine Grange had more than its usual allowance of letters laid in readiness some few mornings after the grand explanation that had produced such a sensation in the household.

And among them was one from Aden for Mr. Lorraine, of sufficient magnitude to make it probable that it contained an enclosure.

"Oh, yes, he is on his way, no doubt," was the well-satisfied exclamation of the guardian as he handed an epistle to Lady Florinda. "My dear, I cannot express my satisfaction at the happy prospect. I must see about setting the jewels left to you by your dear mother, or perhaps Lionel would prefer giving his opinion on the subject."

Florinda quietly read and closed her letter, and Rose perused hers.

"Dear uncle, Mrs. Harper wants me to go and stay with her some time before Easter. She thinks you would rather not be left alone after Florinda's marriage, and, besides, she is far from well. May I go?"

"Well, it is very kind and considerate of her I must say, and I have no objection. Perhaps, Florinda, I may come up to bring you home, and select some of the more important articles of the trousseau in London," he returned.

"Rose, how can you leave me at such a time?" said Lady Florinda, reproachfully, when they were alone.

"Flo, how can you doubt me? how can you think that I would do any such thing?" said the girl, putting her small fingers on her cousin's lips. "I may fail in my diplomacy but not in my affection," and a loving kiss sealed the compact. "Does he seem very delighted with his prospect?" asked Rose.

"You can see for yourself, Rose. This letter might be read in public like a queen's mandate," said Lady Florinda, scornfully.

And Rose quietly scanned the formally indited epistle.

"I am delighted," she said, gravely. "Perhaps, after all, you will not be so unhappy with him, Florinda, dear."

She hastily went off to the conservatory as she spoke.

"There is a manly tone in it," she repeated to herself, "though it is cold enough; but then no man worthy of the name would risk his love on such a die, or, at the least, express it on paper. I expect he is not so detestable, after all, as Flo thinks, only of course she is in love with Leo Franks, and that makes all else out of the question."

Rose Myers's plans were successful so far as their commencement was concerned.

She arranged to visit Mrs. Harper towards the end of February, and Charles Vivian and she had sundry drives and talks under cover of completing some sketches for Mrs. Harper's album before her departure.

"Mind, Charlie, you are to keep all on train down here during my absence, and all letters must be instantly forwarded to me. You dear, good fellow, if we do but manage this business I shall love you better than ever."

Poor Charlie! he was not deceived by this girlish warmth of expression. He knew full well that Rose Myers was not for him, but an angel too bright and high for him ever to dream of her being appropriated by mortal man.

"My dear child, I am so glad there is an invitation for you at last, and where I can send you with perfect propriety," said Mrs. Harper, some days after Rose's arrival at her house; "you must be sadly dull with an invalid like me."

"No, indeed, I am very happy," returned the girl, "but when is the festivity to be? and in Lent too," she added, shaking her pretty head gravely.

"Oh, it's only a sort of 'Mi Carême' outbreak," replied Mrs. Harper, smiling, "a quiet dinner, and then a carpet dance, I believe, really, in honour of a birthday. And, as it is with an intimate friend of mine, I can place you under her chaperonage. It will freshen you up for your portrait, you know."

"Ah, Mr. Franks is to have his first sitting to-day, amica mix, and I will try to look my best for your sake."

"Then I will write an acceptance, and we will see Madame Laurette about your dress. And as to the sitting I think I will send Webster with

you to-day, as there will only be a sort of sketch, and I shall not be wanted."

Mrs. Harper was, perhaps, more strictly correct than she imagined when she made that proposition. Rose, for once, did not wish for her presence. She could easily escape Webster, but scarcely her kind hostess's more practised eyes.

"I am very glad you have come this morning, Miss Myers," said the artist, as he arranged the position of his fair young sitter, "I fear I shall have to put off the next sitting a little while. I am obliged to leave town, but you will not be going away at present, I suppose."

"That depends very much on circumstances," said the girl, speaking French, so as to baffle the comprehension of her attendant. "I am not sure whether Lady Florinda will come up to London before her marriage or not. If she remain at the Grange I shall have to return sooner."

There was a quick contraction of the brow, as if some sudden pain had seized Leo Franks, but it passed in a minute, and he only replied:

"Of course. I believe the marriage has been arranged some time, has it not?"

"Yes, ever since Florinda's childhood," she said. "It is the penalty of heiresses to be fattered like that, I suppose."

"Does she think it a penalty?" he asked again, as he mixed his colours with a downcast bend of the head.

"Would not anyone object to it? Why she scarcely knows her future husband," she returned.

"But report speaks highly of Colonel Mordaunt, Lady Florinda will, I daresay, become attached to him and be very happy," he said, in a constrained tone.

"Perhaps. Do you really think so—really wish it, Mr. Franks?" said Rose, meaningly.

"Do you think me a wretch, Miss Myers?" said Leo, vehemently. "Yes—yes, I do—I do," but the manner ill-suited the words, and Rose was not daunted.

"If Lady Florinda has no other predilection, it is very possible, I daresay. But she is not exactly the character to forget very easily, nor to change, if she should involuntarily care for anyone else. You know her, Mr. Franks. Is that your opinion of her?" she asked, with suspicious demureness in her tone and look.

Leo Franks suddenly raised his head and gazed at the gay girl with a clear, unblushing expression.

"I see your meaning, Miss Myers. You know, or, at least, you suspect that I think Lady Florinda an angel in every respect, but I am not such a selfish, vain idiot as to suppose she could care for an insignificant artist, were I," he added, desperately, "to wish it."

"You really can say that, Mr. Franks? Then you are enviably safe," said Rose, with a half-displeased, half-contemptuous air.

"Then you surely can little understand what love can do, Miss Myers," returned the artist, proudly. "It is a bitter trial, but for her sake—yes—I feel I could wish, ay, and find my sole consolation in her happiness. But it is folly to speak of it. You have surprised my secret from me. I need hardly ask you to guard it, if only for her sake."

Rose held out her hand to him.

"Yes, and for yours too," she said. "Indeed it was no idle curiosity nor mischief that made me draw this confession from you. I believed that you have never told Florinda what yet was plain enough to my eyes. I wanted to know the truth that I might be able to act more freely in the matter."

"To act, Miss Myers?" said the artist, half-pitifully. "What can you do, alas! alas! but risk all her future; and perhaps your uncle's favours? No, no; I will try to bear it like a man, and she will be happy after a while," he added, resolutely.

"Can you not defer your absence from town or shorten it?" she asked. "I should so much prefer to get this portrait finished."

"I will try. Yes, it is due to you that I should. You have spotted my bitterest pain—you have removed my feelings of degradation

and wrong. Your wishes shall be my law, sweet Rose."

And with a warm grasp of the hand that she inwardly decided should be transferred to Florinda, he led her to the door, and she and her faithful attendant rapidly drove home.

"Colonel Mordaunt, will you take Miss Myers downstairs? Colonel Mordaunt—Miss Myers," were Mrs. Arbuthnot's orders to two of the little dinner-party that preceded the birthday dance.

Rose gave a sharp, quick glance at her escort, but his unmoved countenance proved that he did not recognise her as connected with his betrothed bride; nor was it surprising that it should be so, since she had never seen him in his visits to the Grange before she had been under her uncle's guardianship; and there was besides that natural curiosity, a more powerful impulse in her examination of her new acquaintance.

She was certainly prepared to dislike him with all her heart.

He was the cause of her dear Florinda's trouble, and besides she believed him to be cold and selfish and unloving.

His letters betokened this; to her ideas they were ice itself.

Even to Florinda's calmer nature they seemed undemonstrative to a fault, and it was all unlikely that Lionel Mordaunt could possess any attractions which would even make him tolerable in Rose Myers's eyes.

In person he would not have won the admiration of an ordinary girl.

He was tall and high-bred looking certainly, but then his fine features were wasted, and his complexion pallid with the effect of Indian service, and besides which he had a decidedly sad and thoughtful expression which, to say truth, was about the only characteristic that in the least touched or mollified Rosie's heart.

Yet he was evidently no common man, and when he began to speak his voice had the charm of being the richest, and softest, and saddest organ that had ever sounded on the girl's ears.

It was a voice that had only to be heard to give an irresistible force and charm to whatever it uttered.

What would it be if it were to plead any loving words in Florinda's ears?

"I must plead guilty to being stupidly ignorant of all that is going on, Miss Myers," he said, after the first common-place greetings. "I have only arrived in England a very few days—indeed, I might almost count it by hours. I must throw myself on your mercy for my ignorance."

"There is an unfortunate sympathy between us then," returned the girl, demurely, "for I am staying with an invalid aunt, and have seen nothing of the innocent amusements which the season alone can permit. Do they keep Lent in India, Colonel Mordaunt?"

He laughed rather sadly.

"I suppose my unlucky physiognomy betrays where I have been, Miss Myers? For I do not remember that I mentioned the country from which I came."

Rose blushed beautifully.

It had been a blunder, but her quick wit soon covered it.

"That is a cowardly evasion of my question, Colonel Mordaunt. I wanted to find out whether you were shocked at the dance to-night."

"If Lent means penance many Anglo-Indians would say they kept it incessantly, Miss Myers," he replied, quietly.

"Then you are glad to return home, of course?" she said, with a sharp, inquiring glance.

"Yes, of course," he replied, coolly, but there was no gladness in his tone or look, and he added, almost immediately, "You look surprised—but then nothing save gladness and love can have surrounded you. So no wonder you cannot even imagine anything else."

She did, indeed, look lovely and bright in her toilette of lace over rose colour, with her brilliant

eyes and speaking face, more than usually radiant with interest and animation.

"But to return to home and friends," she said, more timidly, "must be almost worth the pain of absence."

"Yes, if one were welcomed by such love as one dreams of—such familiar faces as haunt one's dreams," he said, rather bitterly. "But all this is absurd and wearisome to trouble you with, Miss Myers. I cannot think how I was betrayed into such egotism."

But although he did resolutely turn the conversation to more abstract subjects, and though Rose was voluntarily and against her will interested in his descriptions and ideas, yet those few sentences did sink deeply into her heart.

Could it be that there was some strange misunderstanding, and that Lady Florinda had mistaken the real feelings and character of her suitor?

Rose was provoked at herself for being thus irresistibly attracted by him.

Yet so it was.

During the evening he was either at her side or else watching her from a distance, though so unobtrusively that it was not noticeable to others and probably not to himself.

When they parted he managed to hand her to the carriage by securing her for the last dance, and Rose returned home in a very unsatisfactory state of mind.

She was naturally doubtful whether such a man would not make Lady Florinda happy, and whether she was doing right and wisely in parting the betrothed ones.

"Well, it cannot be helped; she is in love and I am sure she will not care for him or anyone else," she murmured, as she laid her head on her pillow. "I almost wish I hated him as I expected. My heart will fail me, I am afraid, I hope I shall not see him again."

But here she was mistaken.

The next day Colonel Mordaunt sent up a card and request to see Miss Myers for a moment, and as Mrs. Harper was suffering from one of her attacks of bronchial asthma, and confined to her room, the young lady had no alternative but to comply.

The gentleman's errand was to return an ear-ring that he had discovered entangled in his coat, no doubt during the waltz that had concluded the evening's amusement.

What could be the result?

He remained for some brief time lingering in the girl's presence, but yet with such a delicacy of manner that it was hardly to be perceived what was the attraction.

He asked leave to call to inquire after Mrs. Harper, and went away with the same touching melancholy that was so winning to Rose.

And he did come again and yet again, and Mrs. Harper was so indulgent that it might be doubted whether it was not rather by her than by Rose's influence that the run of the house was thus granted to the new guest.

However that might be, Rose at last woke up to the idea that she liked Lionel Mordaunt better than any man she had seen, and almost that she felt sure he liked her also, while her frequent sittings to Leo Franks kept up her sympathy for the lovers.

She still feared that Lionel might be made wretched as Leo himself by the breaking of his bonds to his betrothed.

Rose began to feel like the child who touched the machine he had not power to stop from action.

She was musing rather sadly over this dilemma one morning, and singing idly a little Indian air that Colonel Mordaunt had brought her to copy, when the door opened and he walked in unannounced, and so softly that she was not aware of his presence.

"Rose, sweet Rose," he said, "dare I hope that you sing that song for my sake?" holding her hand in his.

"Colonel Mordaunt, how dare you? This is very ungentlemanly when you know you are not free," she said, in broken accents, that were not very discouraging to her lover.

"Do you think I would insult you, my idol?" he exclaimed, losing all self-command. "Rose,

I have never loved before—my very senses are bewildered at the new passion. I plead for your love, my bright star, the light of my life. Will you deny it, Rose, dearest?"

What could she say, when, as she too well knew, she had fairly burnt her fingers and risked her whole peace in mingling with the hopes and fears and matters of others?

She took refuge in a burst of tears. Lionel was half gratified and half displeased at the distress he had caused.

"Tell me, Rose—why is this? Do you believe me false, or does it distress you to crush my hopes? God knows I would not willingly draw one tear to your eyes, my beautiful darling."

"But you must know this is all very wrong when you are engaged to another," sobbed Rose.

"Yes, you are right. I am tied to one whom I do not love, and who depends on the fulfilment of the engagement between us," he returned. "And had I not seen you, Rose, I might have done my utmost to try and love her and make her happy. But now, if you can, if you will, confess that you do love me enough to share my humble fortunes, I will risk all for your sake," he went on, pleadingly.

Poor girl—she was in an unlooked-for perplexity. There was Lionel Mordaunt coolly proposing to give up ten thousand a year for her sake. She could scarcely accept nor refuse so great a sacrifice.

"Colonel Mordaunt, are you aware of what you are saying?" she replied, suddenly. "Lady Florinda Delaney has nearly ten thousand a year belonging to her. If you refuse, it will be hers. How can you inflict on her such a mortifying blow?"

"Surely anything is better than an unhappy marriage," he returned, quickly. "And if she loves another—she might yet keep the fortune."

Rose started.

"What can you mean, Colonel Mordaunt? Is not the restriction confined to you?"

"Certainly not—at least, not altogether," he said. "Should she and I differ, there is yet another member of the family who will be available to carry out the old gentleman's views. And if the poor girl were to escape me and fall into worse hands, I should reproach myself then, Rose, with her ruin; for if report speaks true my cousin is a sad ne'er-do-weel, and I do not doubt would jump at such a chance of splendid fortune, with ever so unwelcome a bride. And now you can understand, Rose, both why I hesitated to throw up the prize and yet felt it as a weight and a bondage. But now it is different. I love you deeply, Rose. I cannot now, without wickedness, give my vows to another. Nor will I, if, as I trust and believe, you can be happy as my wife."

Poor Rose was indeed in an unexpected perplexity. She had never anticipated that this new hydra would have presented itself.

Had she only saved Florinda from an unwelcome suitor to throw her in the arms of one less safe and worthy?

"You have been candid with me, and offered to give up a great deal more for me than I deserve," she said, sweetly. "But I cannot accept such a sacrifice till you have seen Florinda. She is so good and beautiful you could not help loving her, only that—that I am afraid she would be as reluctant as yourself. And yet if it did turn out to be a mistake, oh, dear—oh, dear, what shall I do?" burst from Rose amidst a flood of tears.

"Rose, if you love me, as I think you do, will you not confide in me this strange trouble of yours?" said Lionel, reproachfully.

She dried her eyes, and her buoyant spirit coming to her aid she said:

"I would—indeed I would, and I will when I am free to do so. Give me a few brief days, and you shall know all."

"And you confess the truth, you will avow that you love me?" he said. "It will be a comfort to me to hear you say it. I will support you in all that is true and honourable; but it would be a happiness to feel I had won one heart. Let us support each other, my Rose."

And she yielded, as any true-hearted maiden of seventeen would yield to the appeal.

Her head drooped, and her hand rested in his as she said:

"If it were right and honourable I would—"

"Would be my wife?—is that it, Rose?" and the downcast eyes and trembling fingers said plainer than words "Yes!"

Lionel went quietly away, and Rose fled to her room, and penned a long letter to Charlie, and a brief letter to Leo, with these words:

"Finish the picture and come. I shall return to the Grange next week, and must see you.—Rose."

Then she sat down to be miserable. A Paradise had opened before her, only to be closed in darkness and sorrow.

She loved Lionel Mordaunt with the gushing affection of her young heart, and had won his love. She had complicated matters and only deepened and spread wider the trouble and mischief she sought to avert.

"There is but one way," she said to herself. "I will tell him all, and then, if he is good and true, he will help me to save her, and if he is not, better know it ere it is too late."

The mystery of who was the "him" or the "he" was solved on the arrival of Leo Franks with the portrait at which he had been working so diligently.

"I want to make a confession to you," she said; that is—if you love my darling Florinda well enough to make a sacrifice for her sake. If not, there is one who does, and will then deserve her better than you do, whatever I may have once thought."

The artist looked with a somewhat amused surprise, as if he was watching the wayward caprices of a kitten rather than a serious responsible being.

"You do yourself and me very poor justice to doubt me at the eleventh hour," he said. "But if you want assurance of the truth, I am fearless. I would rather sacrifice my own happiness than Florinda's—ay, and for life," he said, proudly.

"Then listen," she said, eagerly, and she poured into his ears the whole tale of her griefs and perplexities.

"You see it all now. Poor, darling Florinda will only escape the danger of marrying a man she does not love to be forced to take one less worthy of her, or lose all her fortune; and then if you cannot keep her, and she is miserable, uncle will never forgive me, and I cannot forgive myself. I never heard of this dreadful cousin before. I thought Colonel Mordaunt was the only one who could force her to have him."

Rose pronounced Lionel's name with some difficulty, and Leo listened with the same air of suppressed and grave amusement.

"It is a sad case, my sweet, generous ally," he said; "but it will need some thought on my part as to what should be done next. Am I correct in supposing that Colonel Mordaunt is not over anxious for this marriage any more than Lady Florinda herself?" he added, keenly regarding the girl's blushing face.

"I believe, yes, I am sure it is not his free wish, although he may be ready to fulfil the contract," she replied, with a constrained coolness.

"Then all I can suggest to take the responsibility off your hands and to prevent any misunderstanding is that I should obtain an interview with Colonel Mordaunt and see what our united judgment and love for Lady Florinda can suggest."

"Impossible," said Rose, turning pale at the idea. "It would be such a fearful risk."

"No, it would not. I pledge my honour that no evil consequences should ensue. Colonel Mordaunt is a man of honour, and I trust I may claim the same distinction. If I fail I can but leave it in his hands and see Lady Florinda no more save as Lionel Mordaunt's wife."

Rose had nothing, therefore, but to submit to Leo Franks, and after a brief survey to take her portrait to Mrs. Harper for inspection.

"It is charming, my dear; Mr. Franks has caught your expression to the life, and it will be

a charming wedding gift to Florinda and Colonel Mordaunt."

Rose turned abruptly away, and the portrait was turned with its face to the wall in bitter and tearful contempt.

Some few mornings afterwards Miss Myers received two letters that proved equally unsatisfactory in her present frame of mind.

One was from Leo Franks, couched in the most mysterious and provoking strain.

"I HAVE seen the colonel and we have entered fully into the sad affair which is so engrossing to our thoughts and hopes. There is no doubt from the will but that Lady Florinda must marry Lionel Mordaunt or lose all her fortune, and we both agree that the consequences are too heavy to be risked. It is, therefore, for us to set an example of unselfishness, but be assured that we shall never forget your generous efforts, and, next to my lost Florinda, you will be my dearest memory of the past. LEO FRANKS."

Rose turned with sickening despair to the other epistle, from Lady Florinda.

She and her guardian were not coming to town, and the important choice of her trousseau was entrusted to Mrs. Harper and Rose, on the plea of Mr. Loraine's gout and Florinda's unwillingness to leave him.

Rose did her best in her power to fulfil her task, and returned to the Grange with a far more miserable heart than she had left it.

But to her great surprise she met with but little sympathy from those she loved best.

Lady Florinda was wonderfully calm and resigned to her fate, apparently unconscious that she was sacrificing the happiness of others as well as her own.

Charlie Vivian was equally provoking.

He did certainly listen patiently to Rose's confused tale, but there was a sad insensibility to the melancholy fate, though she did display sufficient dejection to excite his sympathy and grief.

Altogether she was very injured and sad, and then Lionel Mordaunt was expected, and the wedding was at hand, and she would be left with her gouty uncle and her own broken heart.

CHAPTER III.

THE bridegroom elect had arrived, and the meeting and the intercourse between him and the two fair friends were as inexplicable and annoying as the previous events. Lady Florinda was perfectly natural, and even cheerful in her manner to her fiancé, and the colonel, if he did not test her feelings by any lover-like devotedness, yet sufficiently engrossed her in tête-à-têtes for outward decorum and the old gentleman's satisfaction.

The preparations for the wedding were complete, and to crown Rose's astonishment and vexation Charlie Vivian was to be best man, faute de mieux, as Lionel said, or to be near Rose, as he himself declared.

Mr. Loraine was still too completely a prisoner to attend the ceremony, and Lionel volunteered to get a bachelor relative who lived some five miles away to come and give away the bride, which, as he observed, would be the next best substitute for her guardian.

The morning rose bright and lovely as a May day marriage-day should dawn, and Rose Myers felt as if Nature conspired to mock her sorrow.

"Florinda, have you no message for Leo Franks? Have you quite forgotten him?" she said, bitterly, on the last evening after which such words would only be a crime.

"If you see him, Rose, tell him from me that I thought of his happiness as much as my own. I knew that I could not marry a poor artist without sealing his misery and mine. It was best to put it out of the question—he will confess it, I am certain."

Rose felt horrified and disgusted, but there was no more to be said, and she kissed Florinda with a less warm and cordial love than she

could have believed possible on the eve of such a parting.

But, as aforesaid, the morning dawned. Florinda, lovely as the blossoms and the beams of a May-day sun, appeared in her bridal dress. Rose was sustained by her pride and maidenly delicacy to crush back her own feelings and to appear as a bridesmaid should, and the rest of the fair bevy of attendants were young and blooming as the occasion demanded.

It was approaching the magic hour when the ceremony must take place.

Calm, happy, and yet modest and retiring, the very model of a bride, Lady Florinda went to her guardian for his wishes and blessing.

Then she got into the carriage with her official father, Sir Ralph Mordaunt, and the party drove off from the Grange.

Rose bore up bravely. She had, perhaps, less brightness and more dignity and self-possession than was natural to her. But why not?

The self-reliance was forced on her by the failure of all her supports.

Those she held most dear seemed to have little sympathy with her sorrows and disappointments. Her lover coolly and happily prepared to marry the heiress of ten thousand a year.

Leo Franks made no sign, and Lady Florinda openly and calmly declared the impossibility of giving up wealth and station for his sake.

And even Charlie Vivian was rather inclined to think the failure in the stratagem as a good thing for all concerned, and to rejoice rather than grieve at what was death to her fondest hopes.

But still she kept up a brave heart, or, at least, a brave exterior on the occasion. She looked, perhaps, more lovely than usual, from the varying expression of emotion on her bright face, and when she followed the splendidly dressed and beautiful bride up the aisle of the church it would have puzzled Paris himself to have adjudged the palm of beauty between the two.

The bridegroom was already there with his best man, and Rose's quick eyes glanced rapidly at the two. Her brain grew bewildered, and her vision misty as she gazed.

The principal figure in the little group was Leo Franks, and slightly behind him was Lionel Mordaunt, while Charles Vivian half leaned on the other rail in the background.

Mr. Vivian was already there, ready to commence the service; and the "father," for the occasion, was on the left of the bride.

Rose absolutely gasped at the bewildering spectacle, and the terrible risk they were about to run. But Lionel Mordaunt stepped back a pace and whispered:

"Dear Rose, all is well; you shall know all presently," and from that voice she would have implicitly credited a fairy tale.

The ceremony began, and was finished without any interruption. But again Rose was startled by the words, "I, Lionel," etc.

And still more was she astonished when, in signing the register, she saw that Lionel Mordaunt and Florinda Delaney had been made man and wife. She felt as if in a dream, from which she must be roused to fatal reality.

But she could only be patient, and wait what a brief space must reveal. The carriages soon filled, and drove rapidly to the Grange, and then the crisis must come.

Leo Franks must take his bride to receive the blessing of her guardian, and the truth be known.

It was duly performed, was that routine duty.

The young man led Florinda to the library, where Mr. Lorraine had been conveyed to meet the bridal guests, and Lionel took Rose's hand in his and followed in due course.

"Dear sir, let me present Lady Florinda Mordaunt, my fair bride, for your blessing," said Leo, calmly.

Mr. Lorraine literally gasped and choked with rage.

"Sir, sir, this is an untimely coarse jest. Lionel, are you mad or drunk to allow this?" he thundered, when he had regained his breath.

"Pardon me, dear sir. It is a real, and I hope a joyful reality," said the colonel, advancing. "This gentleman, who has hitherto been known as an artist, Leo Franks, and who from some unlucky misunderstanding gratified a passing caprice, and won fame and independence apart from his family, is my cousin, bearing the same name as myself, being the son of my mother's sister, who married my father's brother; and he has within the last hour taken to himself a lovely bride and resumed his own ancient name."

"And—and beggared my ward and deceived me—the rascal! And you—you, sir, have known and planned it all. And you, Rose, too. It is time I was gone when I am the victim of a soundly deception. I wash my hands of you all. Thank Heaven the fortune is safe, and you'll be properly punished," roared the old gentleman, angrily, and giving a sudden start of agony at the pang the passion brought to his gouty foot.

"No, no, do not say so, dearest guardian; it will be for the happiness of yourself, I hope, as well as all of us," said Florinda, kneeling down in her graceful bridal veil, and grasping the withered hand of her guardian in hers. "And Rose knew nothing of it. Lionel, tell dear Mr. Lorraine the truth," she added, turning to her cousin.

"It is a tangled story, but soon explained," said the young man, quickly. "The fact is, sir, that while your ward did not care about me, and had secretly fallen in love with my disguised cousin, I also had found in your sweet niece my fate, and the sole being who could make me happy. This being the case Lionel, or as he calls himself Leo, took the very sensible course of confiding in me the whole truth, and nobly and frankly offering to relinquish all hope and never to see Florinda more rather than she should forfeit her fortune and plighted troth. But our united wits discovered that the terms of the will would be sufficiently fulfilled if she married the testator's sister's son, Lionel Mordaunt, and then all would be saved of money and happiness."

Mr. Lorraine's brow still contracted.

"And pray why did you not come and tell me all this?" he said, gloomily, "instead of all this pantomime freak and nonsense?"

"Because we were afraid of delay and doubts and demurs," said the colonel, frankly. "As you are aware, sir, time was pressing—you were ill, you might have felt a responsibility in accepting any substitute, and thus taking away my bride and fortune. But we have taken the law in our own hands, and whatever happens we have only ourselves to thank for the loss and the trouble."

"And pray who told this gentleman all about your inclinations and Florinda's and his own, I should like to know?" observed the old gentleman, shrewdly, though there were symptoms in his expression that betrayed somewhat less anger and indignation than before.

Perhaps a glance at Rose's confused and blushing face had somewhat guided his suspicions in the right channel, and Lionel gave a proud and amused smile as he drew the girl forward to her uncle's chair.

"This is the fairy who has worked the real miracle, my dear sir. She threw herself heart and soul in the griefs and sorrows of the lovers, but all unconscious that her own fate could be mixed up with theirs. And happily for us all she drew the truth from Leo's lips, and woke it up in my own heart to know my real powers of loving."

And he took Rose's hand in his and placed it in her uncle's reluctant palm.

"Dear sir, will you give me this treasure? You thought me worthy to be trusted with your ward, can you not equally confide your niece into my loving care?" he said, pleadingly.

"Pooh! pooh! young man, it's quite different when I thought that Florinda's fortune was secured by her marriage with you, and I knew your character to be unstained and good. It was quite another thing to giving you Rose with but a slender dowry till my death, and besides I

cannot part with her, and I won't. She is but a child—scarcely seventeen—and on my word if she plays such pranks as these I shall keep her well in hand I can tell you."

"And so you shall, sir, I assure you," said the young man, proudly. "I have enough to keep a wife in comfort, and if you like our home to be at the Grange I can still make it an independent one so far as money is concerned."

"And I have a word to say about that," said Leo, interfering. "Florinda and I are determined not to coolly rob our cousin of what was really intended, in the spirit if not the letter, for Lionel Mordaunt the elder. And a deed is prepared and only waiting for Florinda's signature and mine on her coming of age to-day, by which the estate of Fanshawe Park, with three thousand a year, will be made over to my cousin and his bride. So on that score I trust your objections will be overruled, my dear sir. Nay, you must consent, you cannot be so cruel as to destroy all our happiness on such a day."

What could be said?

Of course the old gentleman pished and pshawed, and tried to hide his real satisfaction under a constrained yielding to circumstances. And equally of course the colonel protested against accepting his cousin's generous offer.

But all was happily concluded at last, and at the breakfast the health of the bride and bridegroom was succeeded by that of Colonel Mordaunt and Miss Myers on their betrothal, proposed by the old gentleman himself.

It was some six months afterwards that Rose Myers herself stood at the altar a bride, and the brightest and the happiest little creature that ever gave her vows to the man of her choice.

She had witnessed the happiness of her dear Florinda and her husband, and heard them bless her again and again for being the cause of the discovery that had ensured their bliss and averted so much misery.

She had the pleasure of seeing her guardian actually growing young again under the influence of the bright and youthful couple who cheered the Grange with their sunshine.

And though she declared she very nearly made a grand fiasco of the whole, and that Charlie Vivian and his father were more instrumental in arranging the final coup d'état than herself, yet she was obliged to accept the honours forced upon her, and to be a heroine in spite of herself, when each returning May her health was drunk on Florinda's wedding-day as the "Cur-tius who had thrown herself into the gulf that threatened to destroy two lovers' happiness."

S. D.

FACETIÆ.

CON. FOR BACKERS OF THE FAVOURITE.—How many "bad seconds" go to a mauvais quart d'heure? —Punch.

THE TANNER CASE.

BUTCHER (reading): "Livin' on nothing—let alone butcher's meat—for a matter of a month! Why, I'd 'ave him 'ung, I would! If folks take to this 'ere system, what's to become o' the British constitution?"

CHORUS OF TRADESMEN (in assent): "Ah! what indeed?" —Punch.

NATURAL RELIGION.

BISHOP (reproving delinquent page): "Wretched boy, who is it that sees and hears all we do, and before whom even I am but as a crushed worm?"

PAGE: "The missus, my lord!" —Punch.

HOPPY-GO-LUCKY.

CAPITAL tidings from the Kentish grounds!

The hops are coming on "with leaps and bounds." —Punch.

GOOD OUT OF EVIL.

A PARAGRAPH headed "Disappearance of the Skylark" is troubling ornithologists. This will be a dreary world with no larks! —Punch.

A MECHANICAL ORGAN.—An artificial nose.
—Punch.

A PRACTICAL SUGGESTION.
Any measure for the relief of Irish distress must be unsatisfactory unless it contains sufficient provisions.
—Punch.

ANTIQUITY OF BICYCLING.
The members of the Bicycle Club always date their letters "B.C." This will astonish future antiquarians.
—Punch.

BUYING FOR THE RISE.—Investing in an Alpen-Stock.
—Punch.

HOW TO MAKE USE OF "THE BLOCK IN THE LAW COURTS.—Try wigs on it.
—Punch.

"HOPE SPRINGS ETERNAL—"

IRISH LANDLORD (in distressed district, who had paid compensation for not receiving his rents, and was sinking his capital in draining works, and otherwise "disturbing" his tenants): "Well, Pat, I hope, with a good harvest, we shall get on without all this 'relief' next season—"

PAT (an Optimist): "Och, plase Heaven, yer honour, we'll have another bad year yet."
—Punch.

"ALL THREE!"

CLERK (who has called to see the gas-meter): "Is yours a wet or dry meter, madam?"

YOUNG WIFE (who does not like to show ignorance): "Well, it is rather damp, I'm afraid."
—Punch.

QUESTION FOR DENTISTS.—O'D's man who has lost his teeth indulge in "biting" satire?
—Moonshine.

AUDI ALTERAM PARTEM.—Reports sent up by gamekeepers on the Scotch moors declare that the prospects for grouse have seldom been better. On the other hand, however, the grouse consider their prospects to be very bad indeed—and surely they ought to know.
—Moonshine.

"SAUCE FOR THE GOOSE."

LANDLADY: "Yes, sir, and I see they've not passed that bill, so the Irish tenants needn't pay no rent unless they're able along of the season, which I'm sure is needed in England, leastways in these parts. Rent is a trouble, goodness knows, as I says to the owner of this house and No. 27, what I am to do. Often I asks him to make it the next week, not knowing which way to turn."

LODGER: "I daresay it is rather a bore, Mrs. Stubbs. But when we get that law over here I shan't want to pay you any rent for these rooms, you see."

LANDLADY: "You didn't never mean that, sir! Surely they'd never allow a poor woman like me to be robbed in such fashion."
—Moonshine.

A BUSINESS CALL.

MISTRESS: Didn't I say, cook, when I engaged you that I allowed no gentlemen callers? Now, I am sure I heard a man's voice in the kitchen last night."

COOK: "Please, mem, it was the greengrocer's man, to learn if I'd heard you say when his master's account was to be settled."
—Moonshine.

"SOMEBODY."

Oh! who shall have the singer's praise,
Who can his rhymes to poetry raise,
Make eloquent this dumb body?
There must be someone who will know
The way to make his verses flow.
Of course there is! I told you so!
Of course there is—a "Somebody."

Then string the harp and touch the chord
(The minstrel asks but one reward,
He's such a modest slow body);
Awake the song to music's chime,
The strain in truth should be sublime,
Instead of this poor halting rhyme.
To "Somebody"—from "Nobody."
—Judy.

A "CRIM" CON.

Why are bathing machines like the interior of Crim Tartary?—Why, because their occupants have to tread their sandy "steppes."
—Fm.

HER HUSBAND'S SECRET.

BY THE AUTHOR OF

"Frank Bertram's Wife," "Strong Temptation," &c., &c.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

A PROPOSAL.

LORD AIRLIE, lying on the sofa with half-closed eyes, tired out by the altercation with his mother, heard the door open and close; then looking up he saw the sweet face he had learned to love so well. He would have risen in greeting, but Miss Jenkins prevented him.

"Pray do not disturb yourself, Lord Airlie, Dr. Browne told us a day or two ago you were not quite so well, and Miss Jenks thought she should like to know how you were, so she sent me to inquire."

"And did not you care to know?" asked the earl, fretfully, "did you only come because that dreadful old maid sent you?"

Rosamond smiled at his fractiousness, much as we do at the petty exactions of a child.

"I could not have come unless she had sent me," she replied, gently. "You always will forget, Lord Airlie, that Miss Jenks has the right to dispose of my time just as she pleases."

"She might have sent you before, ungraciously; what have you been doing since I saw you?"

"The usual routine," replied Rosamond, speaking lightly in the effort to amuse him, though she herself felt sick to death of the life she described. "There has been rather a run on writing-paper and envelopes lately. We fancy every one has taken to writing letters because it's been so wet. Then people have left off working kettle-holders and taken to tennis aprons I think. That's all."

"I do wish you'd leave the shop at home," said the earl, discontentedly.

Rosamond never resented his crossness; she was thinking of the time she had seen him first, strong and active, the picture of health. Now he seemed a nervous, dispirited invalid. She could make allowances for his bad temper.

"Miss Jenks wouldn't agree with you," she returned, cheerfully. "She is always giving me little lectures as to how my conversation can be turned to advertising purposes."

"Do you like the life you lead?" cried Ronald, "answer me plainly, do you like it?"

For an instant she was silent, then she replied, very gravely:

"I do not like it. I believe I am fanciful, I have grown tired of it. The life is too uneventful, it has too much sameness to please me."

"You were not made for such things."

"No," with a touch of sadness in her voice. "But round pegs have to go into square holes sometimes, though they seldom fit."

A long, long pause.

"I must be going. Shall I tell Miss Jenks you are a little better?"

"No, I am not better. I am worse," irritably. "Sit down again, my mother will be here soon."

"I suppose you will soon be leaving the Castle," resumed her seat.

"No, I am hardly strong enough yet. I shall be glad to go; it is very dull here."

"Newbarch is dull altogether," returned Rosamond, "I have become so impressed with the fact that I told Miss Jenks this morning I should leave it."

"Did you really? What did she say? Where are you going?"

"She said," deliberately passing over the last question, "that I was mad; perhaps I am. Miss Jenks thinks my position enviable, and I happen to differ from her."

Ronald Airlie seized his opportunity.

"Let me offer you another life," he said. "Oh, I love you with all my heart and soul. Let me make you Lady Airlie and spend my life in trying to make you happy."

At first Rosamond thought his mind was wandering. Knowing her own sad story so well she had never dreamed that anyone could speak to her of love and marriage.

But the passion in Ronald's voice, the light in his eyes convinced her he was in earnest. Very sharply, yet with a gentle dignity, she answered:

"I thank you with all my heart. You have offered me the highest honour woman could receive, but I am not worthy. I could never be your wife, though I hope always to be your friend."

And then before he could stop her or find words to remonstrate with her she had gone to the door and gently left the room.

CHAPTER XXIX.

THE INVALID.

It was with a sense of undefined fear at his heart that Hugh, Earl of Fairleigh, obeyed Mrs. Clive's summons, and set off for the little house in Spartan Street.

It would have been hard to say which he most desired, whether he hoped for the child's prolonged life, or would have felt his death a release.

Hugh loved his boy with all his heart, he had for his firstborn a deep, passionate affection, which he had never given to the child of his second marriage; but for Bertie, if Rosamond were really dead, he stood alone in the world.

But, on the other hand, his wife had been Bianca's sister, and had, undoubtedly, inherited the same dread disease which had blighted the other's life, though the primary cause of Mrs. Vane's death was consumption. She had given unmistakable signs of insanity before Bertie was born. If the boy escaped the awful taint it would be little short of a miracle, and Hugh was too proud of his grand old name to risk his honours and titles being held by any one liable to insanity.

He would never recognize Bertie as his son, as Viscount Vane, and he could feel certain he had not inherited his mother's constitution.

As he journeyed rapidly southwards he told himself, not once but many times, that it would be best if the child died, yet, such is the inconsistency of human nature, his heart gave a deep bound of relief when he noticed that the blinds were not lowered and that the house looked as cheerful as its wont.

"Am I in time?" he asked, hoarsely, when Mrs. Clive came to him in the little front parlour, "is my boy very ill?"

"Pray do not be alarmed," answered Maud, gently, "there is very little the matter with Bertie, only he is naturally delicate and I wished you to know exactly what the doctor said."

It did not amount to much after all; it appeared Bertie had had a cough and cold from the commencement of the winter, and the doctor now thought it advisable for him to go to the seaside until the summer returned. There was no disease, but the boy did not seem strong, and prevention was better than cure. A few months at Hastings would set him up.

Lord Fairleigh listened unthinkingly, but Mrs. Clive was evidently telling him all she knew. Quite as evidently there seemed no cause for uneasiness.

"You will take him to Hastings," he said, eagerly, to Mrs. Clive, "I am asking you to leave your home without any ceremony, but I am always selfish where my boy is concerned."

"I will take him, certainly," said Maud,

gently, "I do not think I could bear to part with him, even if you wished it. As to leaving home, my sister is married now and gone abroad with her husband, and so I have no one but Bertie to consider."

Lord Fairleigh saw the boy. He reflected, a little sadly, he had not seen him since his wedding-day. How much had happened since? For a moment he was lost in thought. He looked up to find the boy busy with his watch chain.

"The pretty lady, papa, haven't you got her still?"

The earl opened the locket and showed his boy the fair pictured face. It did not hurt him now to see his little son's admiration for it.

If Rosamond were really an angel, might she not look down from the heaven above upon him and his little child?

"Papa," said the boy, "I would love her so much, do take me to see her."

Mrs. Clive was in the room, but father and son had almost forgotten her presence. She would have left them alone, but the earl stood between her and the door.

"You cannot see her, my boy," said the father, with a strange, weary look on his handsome face, "she was not happy, and she died. You must think of her as an angel, Bertie, and some day, if you are very good, you may see her in heaven."

Lord Fairleigh made most liberal arrangements. He went down himself to Hastings and took a pretty, furnished house replete with every comfort. He begged Mrs. Clive to spare no expense, increased the yearly allowance, and then went away.

Not from indifference, not from want of love, but because he had determined that no one of his own set should know that he had a living child, and that Mrs. Clive must never guess that Mr. Clare was an English nobleman.

CHAPTER XXX.

THE LITTLE PEACEMAKER.

"She has refused me, mother."

Ronald Airie and the countess had quite forgotten that little altercation recorded in the last chapter. It was two or three days now since Amelia Jenkins had refused the earl. Lady Airie knew they had met. This afternoon for the first time she alluded to the subject uppermost in both their hearts, and heard the surprising news that her boy had been rejected.

"She is as proud as you are, mother; she did not say so, but I understood she will enter no family who will not receive her as a welcome member; and she is right, her grace and beauty deserve far higher rank than I can give her."

Nothing more was said, only the countess felt a secret relief. But as the days passed, and Ronald made no progress towards recovery, and Dr. Browne grew grave, and spoke of the necessity of guarding him from all annoyance, this relief gave way to a real regret.

After all, the girl was beautiful and elegant. Better far that Ronald should marry her than that he should die.

Without saying anything to her son the countess went over to Newbeach one sweet May afternoon. She dismissed the carriage at the entrance of the little town, resolving to walk on, but in the High Street she met Amelia Jenkins face to face. She, too, seemed to have suffered. There were lines about the sweet face, the smile had grown more wistful. Lady Airie softened towards her as she saw this.

"Will you come for a little walk with me, Miss Jenkins? I have been wishing to speak to you very much."

The two walked down the beach to a quiet spot where people seldom passed. Then Lady Airie looked into the other's face and said, kindly:

"I know all, dear. It was noble of you to refuse for such a motive, but my son's happiness must stand before my pride. I have come to-day to ask you to be his wife and promise to be a tender mother to you."

There on the lonely beach, her head rested on Lady Airie's shoulder, Rosamond poured out her story. She kept back nothing but the reason of her flight from the Court.

"You are so young," said the countess, tenderly. "My dear, your place is at your husband's side."

"I cannot go back, I cannot."

"Then, my dear, at least you must do one thing. You must leave Miss Jenks. The Countess of Fairleigh must not remain in a Berlin-wool shop."

"But I must live. And—"

"I was your husband's mother's life-long friend, I knew your husband well. For both your sakes will you let me take care of you until you are restored to your own home?"

"And you will tell Lord Airie I never thought of—"

"Ronald will not blame you. I think this will be his best cure. My boy is not one to cherish a hopeless love. Dear, if it had been different I could have loved you as a daughter."

When the month's notice Rosamond had given to Mrs. Jenks expired Newbeach was quite electrified. Miss Jenkins was not going into business any more, she was to be a sort of companion to a widow lady at Hastings. Some folks at Newbeach would remember the lady well, she had once been governess at the Castle.

"If you will not take help from me," said the countess to Rosamond, "you must let me find you a comfortable home. Mrs. Clive is a dear and valued friend of mine. She has the care of a rich man's only child. For the little one's sake she has left all her friends and gone to live at Hastings. She needs some cheerful companionship."

The very day that Miss Jenkins left Newbeach the young earl and his mother left the Castle for France.

It was evening when Rosamond reached her new home, a pretty semi-detached villa near the sea. A lady with a sweet, kindly face came forward to receive her. A dim certainty came to our heroine that they did not meet for the first time.

"I am sure I have seen you before, but I cannot remember where."

"Was it not in Kensington Gardens? My little nephew mistook you for a lady he much wished to see."

And then Rosamond remembered her child admirer.

She begged to see him—with one bound he hid himself in her arms.

"It's my pretty lady—my pretty lady come to live with us. But, auntie, how can it be? papa said she had gone to live in heaven."

From that day Rosamond felt at home; she loved Bertie as she had never loved any child since her own little son was taken from her.

Mrs. Clive never resented the boy's preference for her, she regarded it as one of the fancies of the sick, for all these months at Hastings and done Bertie no real lasting good—he was still very delicate.

Mr. Clare had been down not once but many times. He knew all there was to tell, knew that the doctors had left off now saying that the little fellow would be well in a few weeks—knew that as far as human foresight went Bertie would never grow to be a man to give him doubts and difficulties.

He sorrowed bitterly for the little life so closely bound to his own; he would have done anything in the world for the child, but he could not stay with him; he could not bear to witness the slow decay, the gradual loosening of his boy's hold on earth.

"I will come later," he said to Mrs. Clive. "I cannot bear to stay now."

So Miss Jenkins—she kept that name still—never met Mr. Clare; she heard of him, often heard his name pronounced with tenderness and pity.

She wondered dimly sometimes how he could bear to stay away from such a child.

And so the summer months wore on.

There came a time at last when they all knew the child's days were numbered, when the little

life which had caused so much anxiety was almost ended.

A lovely September evening, and they were gathered in the sitting-room, Rosamond at the piano singing the soft sweet music the boy best loved, Bertie on a little couch drawn close to the window, Mrs. Clive near him.

Mr. Clare had been sent for in hot haste; a change had taken place in the day, and the doctors had declared the little boy would not see another.

"Sing," said the boy, feebly, "pretty lady, please sing."

It was his constant name for her. He never said Miss Jenkins from the first; he seemed to regret the name as unsuited to her, and so she sang on, sweet, plaintive ballads that the child knew and loved.

The sunset faded, night came on, still she did not leave the piano.

The door opened.

Rosamond felt instinctively it was the long-expected father, she would have risen but she could not have found the way to the door without passing the new-comer.

"Papa, papa," such a feeble little voice, "I'm so glad you've come in time."

No answer, only a house cound like a man sobbing. Rosamond's heart felt full of pity.

"The pretty lady's not dead, papa, she's been with us a long time, she didn't go to heaven. Perhaps she'll stay with you, papa, if you miss me very much."

A silence, Mrs. Clive broke it.

"Are you in pain, Bertie?"

"No, only I'm so tired. Pretty lady, won't you please come here and see papa?"

Rosamond groped her way to the couch.

The boy took her hand fondly and kissed it.

"It's very dark!"

"I'll get a light," said Mrs. Clive.

The other two stayed with the boy; neither thought of each other, the room was now in utter darkness, only a shadowy form could be seen.

Suddenly the child raised himself on his pillows and clasped the two hands, Rosamond and his father's.

"Good-bye," said the little voice of the peacemaker. "Good-bye, pretty lady; tell papa not to fret."

The light came—too late for Bertie.

Hugh saw his hand in his wife's.

"Rosamond!"

Mrs. Clive saw something more than sympathy for the child's loss linked these two. She went away, and there with only Hugh's dead child for witness Rosamond learned at last her husband's secret. The explanations were long and many. There was nothing to tell we do not know already.

When all was said Hugh put his arm round his wife and kissed her fondly.

"We will never have another secret, darling, never."

They both bent down to press their lips to the cold forehead of the little peacemaker, they both felt a tender regret for the child whose death had brought them once more together.

One word more and we have done.

Lord and Lady Fairleigh went home to the Court, and any wonder at the countess's absence died out when people saw the terms on which she lived with her husband. No question that those two were happy.

Lord Airie married a French princess because he reminded him of his nurse.

But Rex and Harold Ashley never put another woman in the place Rosamond had held.

They are both unmarried still, only there is a little girl in the Fairleigh nursery who may one day be mistress of Allerton.

Miss Jenks has retired.

Rosamond is beautiful still. In Hugh's eyes she will always be the loveliest woman in the world, for he loves her still with the same wild worship he had for her when she left the Court because she thought she had discovered HAZ HUSBAND'S SECRET.

THE END.



[BEYOND A JOKE.]

MABEL BELMONT.

"Oh, mamma, are we obliged to wait until Miss Belmont arrives? It's growing so late, and she is only the governess," lisped rather impatiently a pretty miss of fifteen, as she toyed with a napkin ring, seated at the dinner table.

The lady addressed, very handsome and well developed, with a modish little widow's cap upon her head, and looking almost too youthful, despite its matronizing effect, to be the mother of the three pretty demoiselles who were seated upon her right and left, answered, authoritatively:

"Certainly, Grace, we must wait until the young girl arrives;" and, consulting her watch, added "It will be but a few moments now. My son," addressing a young gentleman in full dress, who occupied the foot of the table, and who was in reality her step-son, "you will accompany us in the carriage, will you not?"

"I cannot, really," he returned, with a pleasant smile. "I have an engagement elsewhere. Excuse me now, please; I must be off; must defer the pleasure of seeing your new governess until to-morrow." And he arose from the table, but a detaining hand clasped his.

"Wait, Percy, please do, and see her this evening."

"Cannot indeed, little sister." And, putting aside the tiny hand, he, stooping, kissed his youngest sister, Floy.

"Never mind," again lisped the elder, Grace, "never mind, sir! I shall inform Miss De Verne that you had an engagement with another young lady, and that is why you did not accompany us."

"All right; she will never believe it," laughed he, gaily, as he left the room; and in ten minutes more the street door closed upon this Apollo—for such indeed he might be called.

Percy Lamar was the particular admiration of Miss Mildred De Verne, an heiress, at whose home to-night were to be gathered some musical celebrities—a rather informal soirée—to which Percy's step-sisters, not yet come out in society, were especially invited, the heiress and Mrs. Lamar being bosom friends.

Almost immediately after the closing of the street door upon Percy came a peal of the bell, and Mabel Belmont was shown into the spacious parlours. Mrs. Lamar's silken train swept through the rooms, and, as the stylish figure of Mabel met her view, the lady, with a start of surprise, coldly extended the tips of her jewelled fingers in greeting. Grace had followed her mother, and while she was being presented, and a few common-places exchanged, Floy stood at the dining-room door, peering into the hall.

"Come here, Eva," she said to the second sister; "look! Thomas is going to carry her baggage up—a shabby old trunk, I've no doubt; governesses never have anything nice."

"Well," returned Eva, looking over her sister's shoulder, "I do not consider that shabby-

looking baggage. Dear me, Floy, I believe she is some fine lady come to be our governess!"

"Here, children"—and Mrs. Lamar entered with Mabel—"come and speak to Miss Belmont." Turning to the dignified young lady in question, she said—"These are your other pupils, Eva and Floy. Now we must leave you to dine alone, after which my maid, Lottie, will show you to your room. We are engaged this evening."

A rustling of the silken train upon the richly carpeted stairs, some parting instructions to the servants, merry peals of laughter from the three girls as they hurried through the hall, and then all was quiet.

When Mabel awoke next morning broad streaks of sunlight were falling athwart her faded carpet, and her watch satisfied her that it was eight o'clock. She hurriedly arose and dressed with care—her usual habit. She descended the soft, carpeted stairs, her princess robe setting off to advantage the exquisite form and the wondrous hair braided and puffed in an indescribable but most bewitching manner.

She entered the library—or at least the room designated as such—whose door stood partly open. The room was shaded and cool, the heavy curtain excluding the sunlight. At first she supposed the room unoccupied, but from the depths of a luxurious sofa arose and confronted her a handsome young giant, and the wickedly captivating eyes of Percy Lamar. Bowing graciously, and with his usual ease and confidence among women, he said:

"Miss Belmont, I presume. I have the pleasure of introducing Percy Lamar, at your service, and the honour of welcoming you to Delavane Square."

"Thank you," returned Mabel; "I am pleased to meet Mr. Lamar."

"Be seated, pray," continued Percy; "this chair will rest you wonderfully; you are fatigued of course after such a tiresome journey."

Mabel accepted his kindness, whilst he in a nonchalant manner occupied the sofa opposite.

"My worthy mother and sisters have not yet appeared below stairs; I find that late hours are not conducive to early rising," continued Percy.

"Not very," assented Mabel.

Just then Mrs. Lamar entered the room, and the beautiful tableau of her young governess and handsome Percy sitting (tête-à-tête) at once soured her temper. She was a woman who never could acknowledge a picture superior and wholly apart from her own lovely self without annoyance; and as she swept by them toward the dining-room, in tones meant to be silvery, she said:

"Good-morning, Miss Belmont! Ah! Percy, you are already introduced to Miss Belmont."

Then a tinkling of bells announced breakfast. The girls came in tardily, and one at a time. Mrs. Lamar led the conversation adroitly, and Mabel ate her breakfast in comparative silence, but was the object of furtive admiring glances from the irresistible Percy.

Finishing her meal, and finding Percy disposed to linger, she excused herself and ran up to her room—the third-storey room in the rear of the house, which looked out upon the wrong side of stately mansions, whose right side no doubt presented very attractive appearances. It was a dreary prospect, truly, to one accustomed to grassy lawns and fruit orchards; still she was pleased that the sunlight would gladden it awhile each morning. She arranged it as best she could, unpacked some pictures and books and a few little decorative articles, and placed them upon the walls and tables, then, selecting a school-book or two, again descended, to begin at once her duties—duties which proved arduous enough at first.

She found her pupils accustomed to no discipline, system or regularity whatever; consequently it was some time before she succeeded in reducing the school-room to any kind of order or quiet. In every possible way Mabel tried to win the favour and regard of the three girls, now verging toward womanhood; but Grace was haughty, envious and critical, Floy pert

and pettish. Eva was the only tolerable one among them; she was won first. Gradually, Mabel gained the love and confidence of Floy, and finally through kindness, extreme amiability, yet firm and decided discipline, she conquered the imperious Grace—who cordially disliked study, but aspired to beaux and French airs—at least sufficiently to receive polite and attentive answers.

Mrs. Lamar voted her, among her stylish ladyfriends, the most accomplished and thorough governess she had ever had in the house; she was bringing the girls on famously. Of the lady herself Mabel saw very little; she was a thorough woman of the world, and her time principally occupied in dressing, shopping, receiving and paying visits, and, later, in joining her friends in trips to seaside and other pleasure resorts. Percy was usually her right-hand man in all these excursions. She loved Percy, just as all other women did, and then he was so courted and admired in fashionable circles that she was exceedingly proud of him.

"I wonder why Percy does not come?" exclaimed Mildred De Verne, tapping the French plate-glass impatiently with her taper fingers. She was not beautiful exactly, but rather what we term "stylish," clad in a royal robe of crimson brocade and India cashmere combined. "He does not often disappoint me."

It was deepening twilight, and she peered far down the dusky street, hoping to catch a glimpse of the tall, manly form. The shadows deepened, darkened; a servant entered, lighted the gas, turning it dim in the drawing-room, where the lady still stood in the embrasure of the window, motionless as a statue. But a brusque, broad-shouldered man of perhaps forty years immediately entered, brightened the gas, and said:

"Don't stand there moping any longer, Mildred! Come over here and examine this new book I've brought you, and read to me while I rest here."

"Oh, uncle, you here?" advancing towards him. "And another new book, dear! What a man you are for new books!" turning the leaves carelessly. "Did you see anything of Percy?" with a searching glance at her companion.

"Lamar? Why, yes, I believe so."

"What did he say?"

"Nothing to me. I merely recognised him in passing a group of young men. But, Mildred, now I think of it, you may as well sit down and quietly enjoy your new book, for I did hear Percy call to George Gordon that he need not expect him to-night—he meant to stay at home and read."

"Read? Percy stay at home and read? Absurd! either you are mistaken, or"—finishing the sentence mentally—"my fears are realized. Uncle," she presently resumed, aloud, "do you think Percy would dare enter into a flirtation with that governess of theirs?"

"Really, Mildred, you're not growing jealous?"

"No, certainly not, uncle. I know Percy would not marry beneath him; but the girl is wondrously fair, and Percy is so fond of beauty. What do you think of her?"

The widower sat contentedly stroking his glossy beard.

"I agree with you—she is very fair. I never met a woman at once so beautiful and lovable. But Percy is safe with her; do not worry."

"Ah, perhaps! But he enjoys talking nonsense to pretty women, and no one has ever yet been indifferent toward Percy when he chose to be agreeable." And with a crimson hue upon either cheek, and an annoyed expression about the thin, compressed lips, the heiress tempered the light and proceeded to pass the evening without Percy.

Presently her uncle slumbered in his chair; then Mildred closed the book and mused aloud, but very softly.

"Percy reading at home, indeed! Flirting with Miss Belmont, that is what he is doing! I'll soon put a stop to that! It's true I've always set my heart upon uncle's marrying Mrs.

Lamar; but, rather than lose Percy, I will give up all else beside—will venture anything! Yes, uncle shall make love to Miss Belmont—marry her if he wishes—since he considers her so lovable. So I succeed in becoming mistress at Delavane Square, I care not who controls this mansion. And Mrs. Lamar is sure to marry someone. I will away to my room now, mature my plans, and commence my enterprise at once. I can delude uncle into anything."

Meanwhile where was Percy? Seated in the handsome drawing-room of the stately mansion in Delavane Square, with Miss Belmont for his only companion. Flirting, talking pretty nothings? We shall see. The handsome young aristocrat had to be very skillful in order to decoy his prize into this dangerous position. She had cleverly outwitted him on many occasions, usually retiring to the privacy of her own room immediately after the six-o'clock dinner, unless there was company and she was urged to remain and contribute to the musical part of the entertainment, as was sometimes the case. But this morning Percy had informed Miss Belmont that he was to make his *début* on the stage—was to appear in an amateur performance—and begged her services, that evening, to instruct him in his part.

"Would she kindly assist him?"

"Certainly she would, willingly."

So it was arranged; and when Percy put George Gordon off, it was music and a pair of bright eyes he intended to read, not books.

"Miss Belmont, you sing divinely," after they had finished a strain, she leading, and he accompanying her in the tenor.

"No flattery! Repeat the last measure once more, please."

"Excuse me now; I will, in one moment, Miss Belmont; I must rest. Let me talk to you a minute while I take my breath. Why is it you will not allow me to be your friend? Have I not plainly shown you that I wish to be?"

"I hope we are friends, Mr. Lamar."

"After a fashion, yes; but although you have been in the house three months, you appear as far from me as the Antipodes. I want you nearer—want you to trust and rely upon me. I know of no lady whom I should rather trust than yourself," continued the impulsive Percy.

"None?" questioned Mabel.

"Not one, I assure you!" and the clear, liquid light in his magical eyes told her he was not jesting. He had possibly said much more than this to dozens of girls, but for this once he was in earnest. "This moment it would afford me unbounded pleasure to hear fall from your lips the words, 'Percy, I am your friend; I do trust and believe in you.'"

There was a tender light in the violet eyes which met his at the close of this declaration, but, turning quickly to the piano, Mabel exclaimed:

"There, you have rested quite long enough! I insist upon going over that last measure once more; then I must leave you—it is nearly ten."

The expression of Percy's usually merry mouth saddened. He was pained, and, resting his head against the piano, he remained silent. Mabel swept the ivory keys in a prelude. Still Percy remained motionless.

"Mr. Lamar, I am going now," said Mabel, rising. Then he rose too.

"Going," said he, "without one word whether you will be my friend or not?"

"Oh, I promised that, of course," returned she, simply.

"Yes, but remember—I do not want an icicle for my friend—one who lives in strict retirement in the remotest room in the house, and answers me in monosyllables. You will promise also to come into the parlour and library sometimes, when I will do as I have to-night—give up half-a-dozen invitations and partial engagements just for the pleasure of your society."

"I cannot promise that, indeed, Mr. Lamar. You forget that I am only your stepmother's governess. Good-night." And she vanished

from his presence and up the broad staircase to the safety of her own room.

Percy's rehearsals were repeated at intervals during the ensuing two weeks, and at the expiration of that time he succeeded in gaining the much-coveted permission to drive Miss Belmont in the park. She had, time and again, silenced his request for this pleasure; but at last he was happy, and Mabel sat by his side in the glittering turn-out, with the handsome steeds stepping proudly upon the gravelled drive. Mabel had been there before, but always in the carriage with her pupils. To be enjoying it all with Percy—this was a new revelation.

Percy's friends noticed her; a few recognised her, some with envy, others with curiosity and admiration. Percy's eyes were on her face; his unmistakable love-notes were sounding in her ear; but she skilfully eluded his overtures, and finally was rejoiced, when he lifted her tenderly to the ground and rang the hall bell, that he had made no open declaration.

A happy light shone in her eyes as she ascended the stairs. She had reached the second landing when a soft voice called:

"Miss Belmont, may I trouble you to come to my room for a few moments?"

"Certainly, madame." And Mabel, retracing her steps, stood in the dimly-lighted apartment, looking divinely fair.

Mrs. Lamar, motioning her to a seat upon the sofa, said:

"You enjoyed your drive, Miss Belmont?"

"Oh, yes, indeed, so much!"

"Then," began Mrs. Lamar, flushing scarlet as she met Mabel's clear eye, "I desire—really, Miss Belmont, I am obliged to ask you not to repeat this evening's amusement."

"I do not understand, madame."

"No? Then I must be more explicit," gaining composure as Mabel became slightly confused. "It is my wish that you discourage Percy's attentions. My son is naturally polite and generous to all ladies; his attentions to you imply nothing serious, and I feel it my duty to tell you so. It has long been understood that Percy is to marry Miss De Verne. This is the darling wish of my life. Percy is young, and though not formally affianced, it is, as I have said, quite understood that he is to be Miss De Verne's husband. Shall I have your promise, then, Miss Belmont?"

Mabel sat studying the pattern of the carpet—rose-buds nestling against cool, green leaves. When the silvery tones ceased she rose.

"Is this all you have to say, madame?"

"That is all. I am really sorry to have pained you."

"Not at all," answered Mabel. "Be assured I shall never commit the same error again. Good-night."

Gaining her own room Mabel sat down by the window in stony grief and mortification. A horrible loneliness came over her; she recognised nothing but coldness and cruelty in all the world; all were false and unkind. She must leave here, pride whispered; she must not spend another day in a house where she had been so cruelly insulted; and, rising, she proceeded to take down her pictures and books, packing them in her trunk. Then, remembering that she had no place of refuge—nowhere in all the world to go—tears came to her relief, and she sobbed bitterly.

The autumn was waning, and Mabel still lingered at Delavane Square. Her place at table was always occupied, and not one duty relinquished; but the joyous light was gone from the lovely eyes and the bloom from her cheeks. She studiously avoided meeting Percy alone, and when he, hopelessly bewildered, sad and in despair, wrote a note begging an explanation, and sent it to her room by Lottie, it was returned unopened.

A week passed, and near the close of a mild day in November, Mabel sat in her own room reading. Upon the table was a bouquet of choice flowers, that had been presented at the

door that morning by a strange footman, and accompanying it a new novel in costly binding, and on the fly-leaf was written: "To Miss Belmont, from Christian De Verne."

Mabel was extremely annoyed, for she observed that his compliments and attentions lately were rather officious. She was thinking of him on this wise when Lottie tapped at the door and presented a card bearing his name.

"He wishes to see you, miss," the girl said.

"You are mistaken, Lottie. Tell him Mrs. Lamar has gone away, to remain all night perhaps."

"I did, miss, when he asked me to say to you that it was important he should see you for a few moments."

Mabel rose reluctantly.

"He probably has some message to leave which he does not care to trust to the servants," she thought. "Tell him I will be down presently."

In a few moments Mabel entered the drawing-room.

"Ah, Miss Mabel!" and Mr. De Verne arose and advanced familiarly to meet her.

She waved him to a seat, and herself remained standing, waiting to hear the object of his errand. He was a handsome man, with long, silky beard and moustache, and dark, resolute eyes. He rested his arm upon the chair and looked into Mabel's fair face for a moment without speaking.

"You have some message to leave for Mrs. Lamar?" "Tell me, please, I have only a moment to spare."

"Only a moment?" and rising he stood beside her. "Miss Mabel, I have not come with any message for Mrs. Lamar; instead, I have something which I wish very much to say to you." And he took her hand in a firm grasp. She tried to release it, her heart bounding into her throat.

"It is something which you must hear," he continued; and she allowed him to lead her to a sofa, despite her terror. "Sit down, please."

She obeyed.

"I am not going to surprise you, am I?" and the determined eyes met hers in bold admiration. "You have long known that I was in earnest in my attentions, which would have amounted to much more had you given me encouragement; but this, I know, your position here did not admit of. And so I come boldly, Miss Mabel, to break this restraint—to tell you I love you—and to ask you to become my wife."

"You are mistaken, sir," exclaimed Mabel, finding her voice at last. "You do not love me; how dare you come here to insult me with your importunities?"

Her anger rising and her eyes flashing, she tore her hand from his clasp and retreated towards the door. But he quickly intercepted her.

"Miss Mabel, I beg of you to listen one moment; I do not insist upon a final answer now; think over what I have said to you; remember that I lay not only my heart but millions at your feet. Allow me to woo you, Mabel, and at last to win you."

"It is useless, Mr. De Verne. I do not desire your love, care nothing for your riches, and hundreds of years would not alter my decision. Allow me to wish you good-evening."

It was his turn to grow angry now, and he hissed under his breath, regarding her closely with those dark, resolute eyes:

"Disdainful girl, you spurn and reject my love with contempt; you will live to repent your decision—remember that!" And immediately the street door closed behind the rejected millionaire.

Returning to the sofa, Mabel threw her head back among the cushions thoroughly exhausted by her excitement and emotion of the last few moments. Twilight was descending fast, and she soon fell into a profound sleep. It lasted, however, but a few moments, for she was awakened by a light kiss upon the cheek, and standing up in affright, there sat the handsome "prince" beside her in the form of Percy Lamar.

"Mr. Lamar! was that action of yours kind or respectful?"

"Yes, both; nothing is kinder than a kiss; nor will you ever receive more respectful homage than mine, dear queen."

Mabel blushed rosy, and her first impulse was to run away, but Percy's arm detained her.

"Mabel—allow me to call you so—this is an unexpected and a great pleasure. Stay—please let me tell you how I love you, how deeply I have suffered from your cruel coldness; and yet I feel almost sure that you love me, Mabel."

"Is it any wonder that I treat you with coldness when you, the affianced of another, can talk to me like that?"

Her cheeks were dyed with crimson, but the love-light shone from the violet eyes. Percy thought he had never looked upon a woman so beautiful.

"It is false, Mabel!" he cried. "Come, let me tell you all," for she was standing by his side.

She sank down again upon the sofa, and then he told her of his love, his doubts and fears. For one moment Percy enjoyed rare happiness as he pressed his lips to Mabel's and enfolded her in a close embrace; but the next instant she released herself from his clasp and exclaimed:

"There! Oh, Percy, you have made me break my promise." And, bursting into tears, she fled to her room.

Percy strode to and fro across the room in perplexed wonder.

"Made her break a promise?" repeated he. "To whom?"

Well, no matter: it was all right now; Mabel loved him, for she submitted to his caresses, had called him Percy, and was overcome with emotion upon leaving him. Still, he did not feel quite secure yet; if he could only see her again! but that was impossible just now; so, seizing his hat, he left the house and walked rapidly away.

Breathlessly Mabel entered the room and locked the door.

"I must leave here and at once," she sobbed, pressing her hands to her aching temples.

She began making her arrangements. At nine o'clock her trunks stood locked and corded, her cloak and hat in readiness. She then hurried down to get a cup of tea, and, meeting Thomas in the hall, asked him to order a carriage to be at the door at four in the morning, and to say nothing to any one. Returning to her room she prepared to write a few lines to Percy. "It would do no harm to tell him now why she was treating him so cruelly, since she was to pass for ever out of his sight."

"Dear Percy!" she cried. "How can I give you up? And yet it is right. But, oh, the agony I shall endure trying to live without you!"

It was a long time before she grew calm enough to write:

"FORGET ME, Percy; it is best so. I am pledged by a solemn promise not to stand in the way of your marriage with Miss De Verne. Therefore I am compelled to take this step."

This she sealed and addressed, then remained in a passive state until after midnight, when she heard voices on the stairs, and knew that Mrs. Lamar had returned. Mabel went straight to her room.

"Mrs. Lamar, I have come to tell you that I am going away in the morning."

"Going away, Miss Belmont? This is very sudden; may I ask your reason for leaving?"

"I have a very good reason. During the day I have received intelligence which makes it necessary for me to resign my position."

"Well, of course, I dislike your leaving my house in such haste, but I cannot detain you if you are determined to go. I owe you something." And she took her purse from the table and handed Mabel a bank note.

"I am sorry to leave you so abruptly," said Mabel, as she took her money; and she was out of the room and upstairs before Mrs. Lamar could say another word.

She waited until the great clock near by boomed three, then made her final preparations

for leaving, donned hat and cloak, and with some slight indecision took Percy's letter, stepped into the hall, and glided down the stairs to his door. Glancing hurriedly about in the gloom which surrounded her, she paused and listened. Far back in the room she heard a restless pacing across the floor. He was up, then. Would he be the first to open the door? If it was locked he would. But she dared not try it to see; so she stooped and slipped the note under it, sprang away, returned and listened again. All was quiet. She tried the handle ever so softly; yes, it was fastened; the letter was safe. She returned to her room, and the sound of wheels announced the carriage as a faint light dawned in the eastern sky. Thomas carried her trunks down noiselessly and she was driven to the railway station.

In a dimly-lighted, wretchedly-furnished, unhealthy room in a cheap lodging-house looking out upon a damp brick wall, lived Mabel. Upon arriving in a strange city she had stifled all pride, and gone from door to door, seeking opportunities to use her knowledge of music, French and painting. But in every instance she had met with humiliating failure. At last she obtained work in a book-binding, and for a time kept actual want from the door. But for weeks she had lain ill in the room previously mentioned. She was much improved in health, but still she was weak.

The door opened suddenly, and a woman addressed her coarsely.

"Well, I hope you have your rent for me; it was due yesterday, you know. And it's troublesome having sick people in the house; you will have to look for another room if you're not able to pay the rent."

"I have but a few shillings left, it is true," Mabel said. "But I am going to try to walk to my employer's to-day, with the hope that I can get more work. I will leave my trunks as security, of course, until you are paid up, and will try to find some other room."

In an hour Mabel was out in the frosty street, beautiful still, but so pale, and the eyes sad and so lustreless! She was very faint, and her destination was distant, and finally, in attempting to cross a street, she grew suddenly blind and fell. A handsome carriage came dashing up the street, and the driver saw her just in time to rein in his steeds. A lovely old lady put her head out of the carriage window, and saw a man quickly snatch the girl from her perilous position.

"John," she called to her coachman, who sprang down from the box, "have the young girl brought here to my carriage."

So Mabel was driven away, still in an insensible condition. It was some time ere she recovered from this second attack of fever, and she owed her life, no doubt, to the watchful care of Mrs. Raymond; and when she grew convalescent, and confided the story of her life to this kind-hearted woman, who had already recognised Mabel's attractions and accomplishments, she said:

"Well, I have no children for you to teach, only my son and myself live in this great house; but I have long wished for a young lady companion. I think, Mabel, you are the very person I have been searching for."

A year passed. Mabel was still enjoying her home with Mrs. Raymond.

Clarence, her son and only child, had gone abroad soon after Mabel was engaged as his mother's companion.

He had been travelling abroad, and was expected home to-night; a young friend would accompany him, he wrote, and so Mrs. Raymond, with a joyous, motherly light in her eyes, was overseeing the putting in order of Clarence's room.

"Read the letter once more, Mabel. Does he mention his friend's name?"

"I think not."

She read the words which were dear to the motherly heart, but no name was given.

"Now everything is in order," she resumed, slipping the key of her boy's room into her pocket; "dress yourself most becomingly to-night, my dear—wear the grey silk."

"Ah, please excuse me," pleaded Mabel. "I would much rather not meet this stranger."

"Not meet Clarence's friend? He would feel offended, my dear. You must not exclude yourself in this way; I insist upon your coming down. The house will seem more cheerful with your youthful face to gladden it, and, besides, I need your assistance in entertaining them."

So Mabel obeyed, just as she always tried to please Mrs. Raymond in everything, arrayed herself in the steel grey silk, and twined some flowers in her beautiful hair.

"You look just like a bride," said the maid, as she gave her a lace handkerchief, when a servant entered, saying, "Would Miss Mabel hasten down? the gentlemen were already in the parlour."

She swept down the broad staircase as gracefully as Mrs. Lamar might have done. Clarence met her at the foot of the stairs, and, laying her white hand upon his arm, they entered the parlour. Beneath a chandelier stood Mrs. Raymond and her son's friend. The former stepped gracefully aside in pleased admiration, but Mabel already recognised the handsome face and splendid figure of Percy Lamar.

"Miss Mabel, allow me to present my friend, Mr. Lamar. Miss Belmont—Percy," said Clarence.

At first the bright colour fled from Mabel's face, leaving her deadly pale; then the rich crimson again bathed her cheeks.

"Mabel," said Percy, taking her hand in a firm clasp, "have I found you at last?"

After some confusion, explanation and congratulation, a general merry time followed.

After dinner Clarence excused himself for half an hour, and Mabel and Percy strolled into the conservatory.

It really appears useless for me to tell what happened there; but Percy told her how he had been searching for her—ever since she had gone away, leaving that cruel note under his door—and how rejoiced he was to see her looking so well and happy in the home of his friend.

He told her that his stepmother and Mr. De Verne were married.

And then, with his arm about Mabel's waist, and his warm kisses upon her lips, he insisted upon her becoming his bride at once.

His home was all in readiness for her, he said, and he was "lord of the manor."

Mrs. Lamar, having re-married, forfeited her share in the estate.

I suppose Mabel consented, for she came out of the conservatory with very red cheeks and a happy, satisfied look in the violet eyes.

Percy led her right up to Mrs. Raymond, asked her to congratulate them, and begged she would look out immediately for another companion, as this young lady had promised to be his through life.

events—is the means whereby his honesty and general good behaviour are ensured. Each emigrant, before he leaves his native shore, gives a hostage to the company that hires him for his good conduct, and any failure is visited upon the head of the hostage. At stated intervals an official visits the master or mistress of each servant and inquires if Chang or Tien Shin has given perfect satisfaction, and notes down the slightest recorded fault. The delinquent is duly warned, and if, on the next visit of the official, there is further complaint, Chang is removed and another sent in his place. The offender is sent back to China, and his hostage is beheaded. One of these celestial "helps" is equal to two or three ordinary domestics. He will wash, cook, nurse the baby or babies, and do everything there is to be done about a house with fidelity and care. Could not some of our domestics be emigrated to China for a lesson?

THE LETTER.

For hours she sat with paper spread
Beneath her hand as if to write;
But not a single word she'd said
Upon the page of purest white.
An easy task it was for her
With school-girl eloquence to gush;
Then wherefore does the pen not stir?
And why this most attractive blush?

Had common friendship urged her pen
Swift on its errand, I'll engage,
The little scribe had travelled then,
And covered over many a page.
But, ah! it is no easy task
For this dear maiden to indite
A letter—and her heart unmask—
When 'tis a lover bids her write!

A sentence may so much convey!
One word a volume may express
To those who read it far away,
And make the meaning more or less!
And so she lingers o'er the page,
On which, in words of living light,
Her heart has written to assuage
Its pain—her task to expedite.

She blushes as she reads the lines,
And—modest maiden—seems to think,
As she at last her pen resigns,
That they are writ with common ink.
And on the page, still pure and white,
She presses one long, lingering kiss,
And trusts that he who bade her write
The letter will not read amiss.

He breaks the seal with eager haste:
"What? Not a word? Oh, yes, I see!
This that appears a barren waste
Betrays my darling's love for me!
When tongue or pen their aid refuse
The heart is then most eloquent;
So, love, your letter I peruse,
And take the kisses that you sent."

J. P.

STATISTICS.

SUNSHINE.—The number of hours of bright sunshine for the quarter to June 30 was 457.8, against 352.1 in 1879, 490.8 in 1878, and 486 in 1877.

JEWISH POPULATION OF THE WORLD.—In the new Jewish Calendar for 5641 the editor, Grand Rabbi Servi, Director of the "Vessillo Israelitico," divides the Jewish population of the world as follows:—Europe, 4,500,000; Asia, 3,800,000; Africa, 500,000; America, 300,000; and Oceania, 110,000, making a total of 9,210,000.

POPULATION OF THE UNITED KINGDOM.—According to the last quarterly return, the population of the United Kingdom in the middle of

this year is estimated at 34,505,043, viz., England and Wales, 25,490,161; Scotland, 3,661,292; Ireland, 5,363,590. For the quarter ending June 30 the births were 301,302, and the deaths were 173,633, showing an increase of 127,669, or at the rate of above half a million a year.

HOUSEHOLD TREASURES.

RYE CAKES.—Four eggs and a pint of milk, one teaspoonful molasses, one teaspoonful cream of tartar, one-half teaspoonful of saleratus. Stir in rye-meal enough to make a thick batter. Beat the yolks and whites of eggs separately.

AN EFFICIENT DISINFECTANT.—A disinfectant ingeniously composed of one part of rectified oil of turpentine and seven parts benzine, with the addition of five drops of oil of verberna to each ounce, is recommended by Dr. Day, an Australian physician, for destroying the poison germs of small-pox, scarlet fever and other infectious diseases in hospitals. Its purifying and disinfecting properties are due, he says, to the power which is possessed by each of the ingredients of absorbing atmospheric oxygen and converting it into peroxide of hydrogen—a highly active oxidizing agent, and very similar in its nature to ozone. Articles of clothing, furniture, wall-paper, carpeting, books, newspapers, letters, etc., may, it is stated, be completely saturated with it without receiving the slightest injury; and when it has been once freely applied to any rough or porous surface its action will be persistent for an almost indefinite period.

MISCELLANEOUS.

The Jesuits recently expelled from France have purchased Hales' Place, near Canterbury, for many years the residence of Miss Féllicité Hales, a Roman Catholic lady. The sum paid for the mansion, together with 57 acres of land, was £24,000, and it is intended to have a Jesuit College on the estate for 150 pupils.

A useful and interesting International Food Exhibition will be opened at the Agricultural Hall, Islington, on Wednesday, October 13. It will comprehend foods, animal and vegetable, British, colonial, and foreign, and the processes of manufacture, preservation, and cooking, and be of value not only to consumers of every class but also to traders engaged in the food traffic of the country.

MADAME PATTI has not closed with an engagement in America, at the rate of £80,000 a year, for eighteen months, for the simple reason that no such offer has ever been made to her.

The example set notably by Mr. Brassey, in the "Sunbeam," of making a yachting voyage round the world, has been followed by Mr. Lambert, who the other day started from Cowes in his splendid screw yacht, the "Wanderer," on a three years' cruise with his wife and family. The "Wanderer" is one of the largest and finest ocean-going yachts, perhaps, in the world, measuring as she does 812 tons. The "Sunbeams" manned the gunwale fore and aft, and gave the "Wanderers" three hearty cheers.

WHAT will a woman not do for the man she loves will be exemplified by the Baroness Burdett-Coutts in the event of her marriage with Mr. Ashmead Bartlett. By contracting a marriage with an alien or a naturalised subject the baroness loses all her interest in Coutts's Bank, her residence in Piccadilly, and her lovely place, Holly Lodge, at Highgate. Verily, the love of nearly three score years and ten must be strong. The whole of the above property, which, under the terms of the will of the Duchess of St. Albans, will be forfeited by this marriage, will pass to the younger sister of the baroness, the widow of the late Rev. Dr. Drummond Money, of Petersfield.

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NOTICES TO CORRESPONDENTS.

R. L. M.—To prevent flies from injuring picture-frames, glasses, etc.: Boil three or four onions in a pint of water; then with a gliding brush do over your glasses and frames, and the flies will not alight on the article so washed. This may be used without apprehension, as it will not do the least injury to the frames.

CAREY.—Flirting is a reprehensible and dangerous as well as questionable "sport." It is always damaging to the reputation of a young lady. It may be delightful for the time; it is fatal in the end. No sensible man will marry a flirt. No source is so prolific of domestic unhappiness as flirtation after marriage.

N. D. S.—A good ink-eraser is thus made: Take of chloride of lime one pound, thoroughly pulverised, and four quarts of salt water. The above must be thoroughly shaken when first put together. It is required to stand twenty-four hours to dissolve the chloride of lime; then strain through a cotton cloth, after which add a teaspoonful of acetic acid to every ounce of the chloride of lime water. The eraser is used by reversing the pen-holder in the hand, dipping the end of the pen-holder into the fluid, and applying it, without rubbing, to the word, figure, or blot required to be erased. When the ink has disappeared, absorb the fluid with a blotter, and the paper is immediately ready to write upon again. Chloride of lime has before been used with acids for the purpose as above proposed; but in all previous processes the chloride of lime has been mixed with acids that burn and destroy the paper.

S. D. F.—1. We know of nothing better than cold water bathing. 2. We have no faith in the remedies you refer to. 3. A regular physician would, we think, be able to cure you in time.

MATILDA J.—With your delicate skin you should use, say, Batchelor's Pure Skin Soap, which is recommended as being one of the very best. It is kept by most chemists and hairdressers, or you can procure it direct from W. E. Millard, 17, Farringdon Road, E.C., at a shilling the box of four tablets.

ANNIE.—Write a simple and lady-like note, and request the gentleman to return your letters. In future be careful how you put such nonsense on paper. If you have occasion to write love-letters let them be as full of sentiment and kind feeling as you desire, but avoid "gush."

E. I.—An efficacious and innocent preparation for whitening and softening the hands may be made at home after the following recipe: Mix half a wineglassful of eau de cologne, and the same quantity of lemon juice. Then scrape very fine one cake of brown Windsor soap, and mix all well together in a mould. The mixture will harden and be found a delightful toilet preparation.

D. D.—To wash black silk stockings, which have no coloured clocks or embroideries upon them, a little ammonia in the rinsing water gives them a finer black, but ammonia is likely to injure other colours.

R. O.—The smoke of charcoal will destroy crickets, and loud sounds, such as the explosion of fire-arms, will drive them away.

DEYARDUST.—You are right. It is sometimes a perplexing matter to solve. One cannot help being thirsty this hot weather, and yet one does not want to be always drinking; it is inconvenient and expensive. Try Cooper's Effervescent Lozenges. They have risen into high favour as throat quenchers, and they have the decided advantage of being easily carried, and therefore may be always available. W. T. Cooper, of 26, Oxford Street, W.C., is the patentee and manufacturer.

F. M.—The following may possibly explain your trouble: When a fire is lighted in a stove or grate the air in the chimney over it becomes heated by the fire, and therefore lighter than the external atmosphere, and consequently it ascends. Thus is produced what is called a draught in the chimney, which is merely an upward current of air produced by the ascent of the heated air confined in the flue. When a grate or stove has remained for some time without a fire in it, the chimney, grate, etc., become cold, and when the fire is lit it does not heat the air fast enough to produce a current necessary for the draught; and as the smoke will not ascend it issues into the apartment.

TOM and DICK, two soldiers, would like to correspond with two young ladies. Tom is thirty-two, tall, fair, good-looking. Dick is twenty-three, medium height, good-looking, loving.

FIRST LOOKOUT and NEXT ASHWHIP, two seamen in the Royal Navy, would like to correspond with two young ladies. First Lookout is nineteen, medium height, considered good-looking. Next Ashwhip is nineteen, tall, fair, fond of home and children.

MINNIE, eighteen, tall, dark, considered good-looking, of a loving disposition, would like to correspond with a young man between twenty and twenty-eight.

JANET, eighteen, brown hair, tall, good-looking, would like to correspond with a young man between twenty and twenty-eight.

S. JACK, twenty-three, medium height, light hair, grey eyes, fond of home and children, would like to correspond with a young lady with a little money with a view to matrimony.

LANCASTER, eighteen, medium height, dark hair, good-looking, would like to correspond with a young lady between seventeen and eighteen.

SARAH P., eighteen, dark brown hair, hazel eyes, fond of home and children, would like to correspond with a young man about twenty-one.

CIRIE, twenty-two, dark, brown hair, would like to correspond with a young lady about eighteen.

R. L., twenty-six, medium height, fair, would like to correspond with a young lady with a view to matrimony. Respondent must be tall, good-looking, of a loving disposition, fond of home.

MABEL and BETTY, two friends, would like to correspond with two young men with a view to matrimony. Mabel is dark, medium height, of a loving disposition, hazel eyes, fond of music and dancing. Betty is twenty, dark, hazel eyes, tall, of a loving disposition, fond of home and music.

COME BACK.

COME back to me! The world is full of night!
A dreary, empty space
Stretches for ever, like a withering blight,
Between me and your face!
But day would dawn—and night's dark shadows
fly,
Could I but hear you call: "Come back to me!"

Have I not borne, dear love, and suffered long
This life-consuming ache?
Have I not made atonement for all wrong
You've suffered for my sake?
I crave your pardon here on bended knee—
Will you not answer: "Love, come back to me!"

On all the anguish and the cruel pain
Of these long, silent years;
On all past wrong of mine, oh, darling, rain
Your sweet forgiving tears.
Grant me your soul's forgiveness full and free,
And crown it with the words: "Come back to me!"

I did not mean to wound your tender heart
With bitter, stinging words!
What can I do to heal the cruel smart?
—Like helpless, prisoned birds,
I snare your hands—nor will I set them free—
Until your soul cries out: "Come back to me!"

But if on earth the glory of our past
Is dimmed for ever more;
My soul will hold its faith unto the last
That on life's other shore
Your living voice—like music on the sea—
Will softly whisper, "Love, come back to me!"

L. A. P.

ADJUSTING LEVER and COCKING PLATE, two seamen in the Royal Navy, would like to correspond with two young ladies with a view to matrimony. Adjusting Lever is twenty-four, medium height, fair, hazel eyes, considered good-looking, of a loving disposition, fond of home and children. Cocking Plate is twenty-four, medium height, blue eyes, of a loving disposition, fond of home and dancing. Respondents must be twenty-one, good-looking, fond of home and children.

MINNIE and LILIAN, two friends, would like to correspond with two young gentlemen. Minnie is eighteen, medium height, dark hair and eyes, thoroughly domesticated, fond of music and dancing. Let is seventeen, medium height, fair, of a loving disposition, domesticated, fond of music and dancing. Respondents must be eighteen and nineteen.

MAGGIE and ALICE, two friends, would like to correspond with two young gentlemen. Maggie is tall, dark, good-looking, fond of home. Alice is fair, medium height, brown hair, blue eyes, of a loving disposition. Respondents must be tall and dark.

VIOLET and LILIAN, two friends, would like to correspond with two young gentlemen. Violet is nineteen, medium height, dark hair, hazel eyes, fond of music. Lilian is eighteen, tall, brown hair and eyes, of a loving disposition, fond of music and dancing.

W. D. and A. D., two friends, would like to correspond with two young ladies from eighteen to twenty with a view to matrimony. W. D. is twenty-three, tall, fair, good-looking. A. D. is twenty-three, medium height, fair, good-looking.

EDITH and GLADYS, two friends, would like to correspond with two young men with a view to matrimony. Edith is eighteen, brown hair, grey eyes. Gladys is nineteen, dark hair, brown eyes, of a loving disposition. Respondents must be twenty, tall, dark, fond of dancing.

W. E., sixteen, fair, auburn hair, blue eyes, medium height, would like to correspond with a young gentleman about twenty.

N. E. F., twenty-four, light hair, blue eyes, medium height, dark, fond of home and music, would like to correspond with a young lady about twenty-one, loving, good-looking.

FRED, twenty-four, medium height, fair, would like to correspond with a young lady with a view to matrimony. Respondent must be about nineteen, fair, good-looking, fond of music.

COMMUNICATIONS RECEIVED:

MARION is responded to by—A. B., medium height, fair, good-looking.

A. R. by—Sharkey, nineteen, tall, good-looking.

H. S. by—Teapot, twenty, medium height, fond of home and children.

Nelly B. by—Bos.

ADELAIDE by—Saucy Eric, twenty-two, dark, medium height.

C. E. KATIE by—C. M., twenty-one, tall, good-looking, fond of children.

DORA ETHEL by—L. K. B.

NOIST GEORGE by—Clara, twenty-two, tall, dark, of a loving disposition.

HAPPY WILLIAM by—Alice, twenty-two, fair, dark hair, fond of home and children.

BASHFUL HARRY by—Lizzie, twenty, fair, of a loving disposition, fond of dancing.

HENRY by—Rosie, eighteen, tall, dark, considered good-looking.

HANDSOME HARRY by—Evelyn, seventeen, medium height, brown hair, grey eyes.

DORA by—H. F.

S. G. by—Lily, nineteen, medium height, fond of home and music.

DORA ETHEL by—P. H. G., eighteen, good-looking.

ETHEL by—Musician, twenty-three, blue eyes, of a loving disposition, fond of home and children.

FRANK S. by—Ethel, twenty-two, medium height, fair, of a loving disposition.

GEORGE by—Agnes, twenty, tall, dark hair and eyes, fond of home and music.

HANDSOME HARRY by—Little Buttercup.

GEORGE H. by—Nellie H., eighteen, medium height, fond of home.

H. F. by—Hettie L., seventeen, fair, of a loving disposition.

A GERMAN by—Naughty Jeannie, twenty, medium height, fair, blue eyes, of a loving disposition, with a small fortune.

SATCY KITTY by—Reckless Will, eighteen, tall, dark, fond of music.

HAPPY ETHEL by—Captain Tom, eighteen, tall, dark, fond of music.

DORA by—Daniel O., twenty-two, medium height, dark, loving.

C. F. by—W. J., nineteen, medium height, dark.

CHARLEY by—Clytie, medium height, fair, blue eyes, loving, fond of dancing.

FRANK G. by—Daisy, seventeen, tall, fair, fond of music.

ETHEL by—William J., tall, dark, handsome, fond of music.

FRANK S. by—Beatrice G., tall, fair, fond of home and dancing.

GEORGE by—Mabel, tall, fair, of a loving disposition.

S. G. by—B. L., twenty-three, medium height, of a loving disposition.

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London: Published for the Proprietors at 334, Strand, by A. SMITH & Co.